# BLUEPRINT

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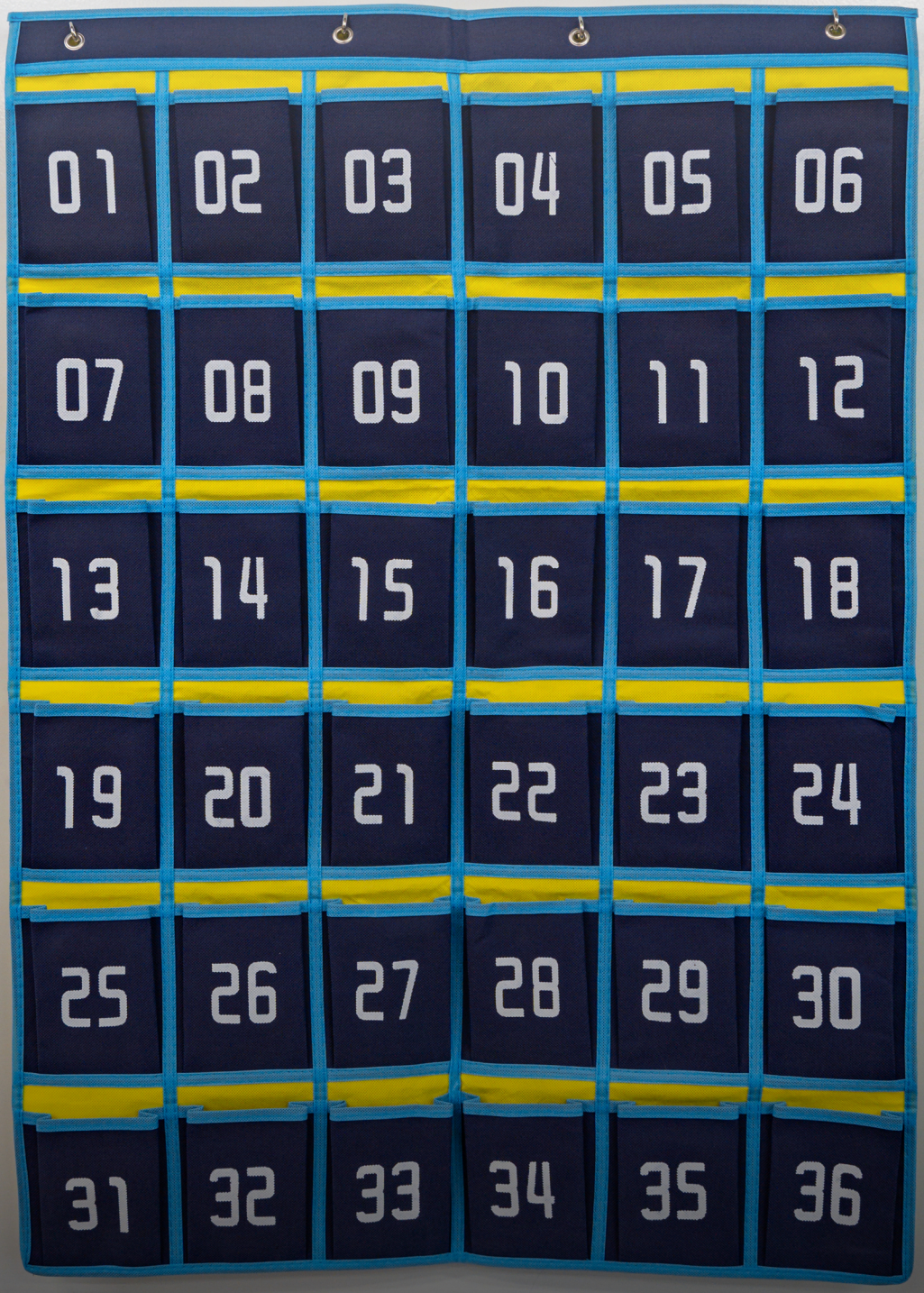


## Breaking Down the Evolution of High School Cell Phone use Policy

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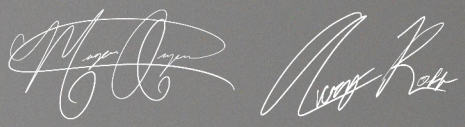
Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

We are so excited to share Issue 1 of *Blueprint's* 85th Volume with you. From overcrowded classrooms to fall sports captains, *Blueprint* covers a variety of on-campus topics and investigates longstanding district experiences. *Blueprint* also covers a diverse range of community events, such as a local non-profit supporting young female entrepreneurs and the Acalanes Band's last A's game performance.

In our cover story, *Blueprint* explores the evolving landscape of restricted cell phone use in schools through the initiatives of the Acalanes Union High School District and the State of California. The District's updated policy comes amidst tightened efforts to eliminate distractions and improve the learning experience of its students. *Blueprint* spoke to members across the district to investigate the change's impact on the Acalanes Union High School District's community.

To submit a response to any story within our paper, scan the QR code to submit a letter to the editor through *Blueprint* Online. Please refer to the bottom of the Table of Contents for *Blueprint's* mission statement. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Blueprint* and look forward to sharing more stories in the future.

Maya Agarwal & Avery Robb, Print Editors-in-Chief



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# Striking the Final Chord: Acalanes' Last A's Performance

*The Symphonic Orchestra says goodbye at their final A's game performance*

Zoe Stafford, Sophie Gold, and Gwyneth Lee | Azure Editor, Business Manager, and Staff Writer

The loss of tradition and farewells are not fondly regarded topics, but they also offer a chance to celebrate memories made. As the Acalanes band plays the national anthem at the Oakland A's stadium for the last time, they will not be the only ones saying goodbye to the welcoming doors of the ballpark.

The Acalanes Symphonic Orchestra played for the last time at the Oakland Athletic's (A's) stadium on Sept. 2, before the team's move out of the Bay Area next year.

The tradition started two years ago when the Symphonic Orchestra joined an initiative by the A's for Bay Area school bands.

"The A's has an outreach program [that] ... schools can apply to [to] perform the national anthem, and so we decided to do it," Director of Instrumental Music Edwin Cordoba said.

Before each performance, band students prepare by rehearsing their parts, the A's game being no different.

"We prepare for the performance by practicing our individual parts and then coming together and practicing as a group ... it offers a really cool opportunity," violinist and junior Lauren Anderson said.

Many students see value in performing at the A's stadium. They feel the performance benefits the school's performing arts program by building ability through experience.

"Performing in front of such a large audience is good for us. It helps us with courage, you could say. It's just a good experience to be out there performing," violinist and senior Leonardo Wang said.

*Blueprint* Photo/Isaac Topp
The band performs the National Anthem on the A's field.

Students also emphasize the coverage that the unique performance provides for the band.

"Just like any other sport can play in front of hundreds of people, this is our chance to perform in front of thousands and show what we can do," Anderson said.

The A's game performance also serves as a special opportunity for members to bond with each other during and after the event.

"It benefits the band since all the ensembles have the opportunity to meet each other and also bond afterward through watching the game together," senior Monique Khouw said.

At the game, many Acalanes students and baseball fans watched and supported the musicians during their performance.

"I thought the performance was great. It's really cool to see my friends [and] schoolmates play the national anthem on the field. This was the third time I had seen them perform at the A's game," senior Joe Terhar said.

The Symphonic Orchestra felt satisfied with their last performance at the stadium as a team.

"They did a great job. They performed with a lot of preparation, and I think that the performance met the preparation," Cordoba said.

Although this will be the last time they play at the A's stadium, the Symphonic Orchestra performs at many other events to be active in the community in various aspects.

"Performing at the Oakland A's is just one small way we give back to the community. We do so much more than putting on concerts in the [Performing Arts Center]. We have a thriving community [through] music club, we advance students to state-level and international festivals, we compete at various competitions throughout the country, and we showcase spirit and pride on campus," Cordoba said.

# School Rules Are on the Move

*New and updated policies implemented across campus*

Cameron Powell, Donovan McGrath and Shiraz Kamran | Online Editor in Chief, Business and Community Outreach Team Member and Staff Writer

As students sit amongst their classmates at the start of the new school year, many notice differences in certain classroom functions compared to last year. The grading scale listed on class syllabuses appears new, teachers announce expectations regarding artificial intelligence (AI), and students type on an array of computers instead of uniformly school-issued Chromebooks.

The Acalanes administration and the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) introduced multiple updates to school policy for the 2024-2025 school year in order to improve various aspects of the school.

**Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)**

The BYOD policy encourages students to bring their own personal laptop or computer to school instead of a school-issued Chromebook. Although administration created the system for the 2023-2024 school year, they emphasized a transition to this system for the 2024-2025 school year after observing student device use.

"We were finding that some of our students were taking [school-issued] devices even if they didn't need one [while other] students were bringing [their own] devices because they have different preferences," Associate Principal Andrea Powers said.

While administration asks that students bring a personal device, the school still offers Chromebooks to any student who needs one.

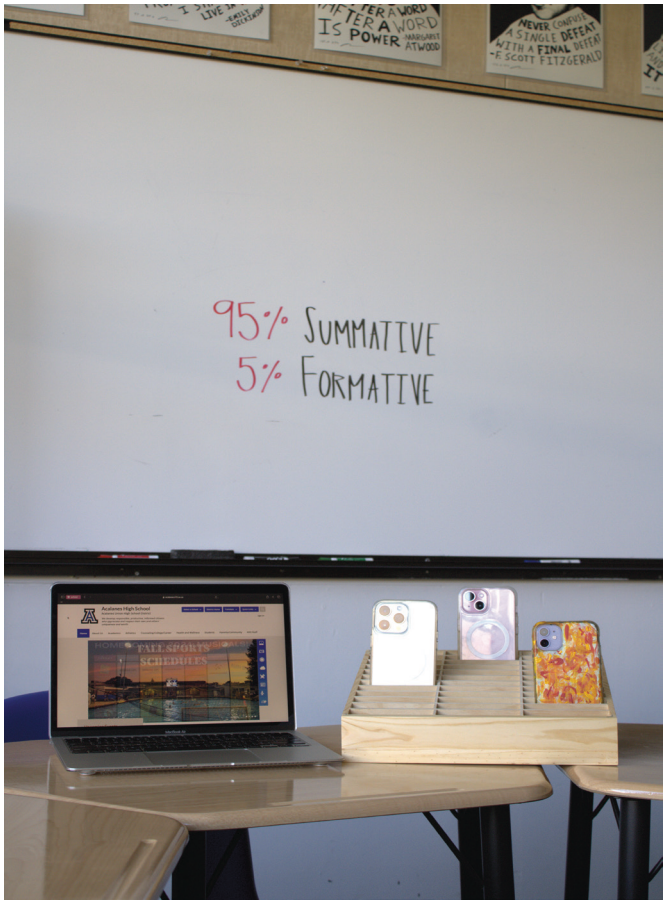
"If you need a device, we're going to make sure that you have one ... but you [can] bring whatever device that you feel more comfortable using and that's going to help you be successful," Powers said.

The Acalanes administration transitioned to a BYOD policy this year partly due to the expenses that come with providing Chromebooks for every student.

"Each year the cost of [Chromebooks] have increased. A couple of years ago they were $295 each [and] now they're $595 each ... Then [there are also costs to] repair them, and [when] they go missing [we have to replace them]," Powers said.

Due to the costs of supplying Chromebooks to each student, some believe that the BYOD system can be a potential way to redirect some of the school funding.

"I think it's good that they give everyone the opportunity to get [a school-issued Chromebook]. But I also think that if students are able to afford laptops then it could help the school fund other things," frosh Emmet Fretwell said.




*Blueprint* Photo/Haley Chelemedos

Some have observed that the policy is coming with a new learning curve for teachers and other administrators due to the wider range of devices in classrooms.

"You just get all different types of devices now, and some students have Chromebooks, some have [personal computers], and some have Macs, and then you have all different levels of understanding how their device works and how to put things on it," Acalanes librarian Barbara Burkhalter said.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy**

The AUHSD also implemented an updated AI policy for classrooms to enforce across the district this school year. The policy includes guidelines on how to responsibly use AI without violating the district's academic honesty policy.

"We had a policy last year. [But this year] the librarians at all four schools kind of created new verbiage, new language, [and] a new [guideline] to put in our syllabus about acceptable and unacceptable use of AI ... So we had [a policy before], but now it's been updated, and it's getting better each iteration," English teacher Erin Barth said.

During the process of forming this policy, the librarians administered a survey to teachers at all four schools in order to gauge their perspectives on AI.

"I think our sense was from implementing the survey was that teachers just wanted guidance, especially on the ethics of [AI]," Burkhalter said. "Students could see it as [something that] could be really helpful, [and while] it can legitimately be helpful, it can also be a form of plagiarism or cheating."

Some view the latest policy as beneficial to both teachers and students due to the guidance it provides.

"I'm hoping that the new policy will discourage students from using AI in un-

authorized and inappropriate ways, but we're just going to have to see because it's changing all the time, and so there's ways to get around it," Barth said. "Hopefully students will start believing in the teacher's ... ability to teach them and their ability to have solid responses that they create themselves without having to use [AI]."

Others are hesitant about working with an AI policy and have found ways to fully remove the potential for AI usage.

"I don't know what the future of teaching research is, I don't know what the future of teaching writing is ... but I can say that any writing done in my class this year will be done by hand," United States history, ethnic studies, and human and social development teacher Brian Smith said.

However, some teachers are incorporating AI programs into their classes to help facilitate giving students timely feedback on their assignments.

"I'm planning on using Class Companion to help give feedback with writing because that's one of the most difficult parts of my job [to give feedback quickly] ... I will say that I do personally use it in generating teaching content, especially with things like generating sentence starters," Advanced Placement (AP) United States History and Government and Economics teacher Adam Garcia said.

Many students view the policy as a helpful way to counteract cheating.

"I think it's good that we have [an AI policy] ... I feel like it helps the students really learn more and do more work," Fretwell said.

Other students believe that a formal policy will not be sufficient to ensure academic honesty.

"Oftentimes, if manipulated correctly, any AI checkers that a teacher might use can falsely say that AI work is human-made. I think that this policy that allows it [in certain cases] will just incentivize more AI use," senior Christopher Truta said.

As the school year progresses and teachers begin to assign work that potentially deals with AI, staff members plan to administer some formal classroom discussions about the policy, to help students understand acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI.

"We will be rolling out some education for the students, at least about the basic ethics of it and be thinking about this and understand when it's cheating or not cheating," Burkhalter said.

Some point out that helping students understand the ethical versus unethical uses of AI may further the impact of the AI policy.

"It's easy and convenient to have AI do work for you, but that would hinder your growth as a student, hinder the development of your skills. Understanding appropriate [uses] and using [AI] as a tool to promote efficiency will allow you to develop your skills and find more efficient, faster ways to work," Garcia said.

**Grading**

The district also standardized grade limits for teachers to adhere to this school year, creating more uniform grading policies across each course.

"Teachers over the last two years across the district have come together to develop ... the essential [details] within the course ... the grading policy titles, and ... the grading scales that match really what is happening in our classroom[s]," Powers said.

Before the updated grading policy, the district set a ten percent range for each grade letter, but individual teachers were allowed to decide the weight of each category, summative and formative, in their course. This means that in the past, students taking the same course with different teachers could have largely different grades despite scoring similarly on assignments and tests.

The new grading policy differs, with a set weight for each course rather than a range.

"If we just have the same numbers, that's arbitrary, it doesn't have anything to do with me as a teacher or my instruction, my autonomy, it just really has to do with these numbers, and so I think it's in the best interest for students, but I think it will also ultimately helps teachers because there's less frustration and we all can say we really are on the same page," Barth said.

The new grading requirements led teachers to collaborate and come up with a weighting system that fit each of their classes collectively.

"As far as weighting goes, I had to go back [and] change my old weighting to match the other US history teachers," Smith said.

The weighting requirement for traditionally academic classes involves formative and summative grades. Teachers of the same course collectively decided on categories and weights to adhere to in these categories.

"[For general English courses], it is 20 percent formative, which is classwork, homework, anything informal, and 80 percent summative, which means tests, quizzes, essays, anything like that ... for AP [Literature] it's 90 [percent summative and] ten [percent formative]," Barth said.

Many teachers see the grading system as an opportunity to be fair to all students within courses across the district.

"It's important for me, [that teachers do not] have policies that change the perception of our class or make students think one class is easier to pass or easier to get an A in," Garcia said. "In the district, you will see the same policy so there is consistency beyond just a single campus."

The Acalanes administration hopes that having a more standardized grading system will be beneficial to both students and teachers.

"[Teachers] are all in agreement [on] what's essential to be taught and how it's going to be looked at and the percentage of where it will fall within the grade. I think having a team of teachers be on the same page for that is really good for curriculum and it's good for students," Powers said.

# Classroom Crunch

## *Investigating reasons for crowded class sizes and its impact on education*

Molly Connelly, Emily Roberts, and Mika Katznelson | Print Feature Editors and Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Graphic/Bo Chevaleau

Picture yourself as a new student walking into your first day at Acalanes High School. Your stomach is filled with butterflies as you walk into first-period. Every face in front of you looks unfamiliar. As the bell rings, you look around for a desk, but suddenly realize that there are none left. A flush comes across your face as you spend your first class at Acalanes sitting awkwardly at the teacher's desk.

A combination of fiscal issues, varying classroom sizes, and fluctuating student demand results in many Acalanes High School students and staff noticing what feels like overcrowding in classes across subjects. *Blueprint* sought to investigate these observations and explore the complicated puzzle of student schedules and class sizes.

To try and ensure that all Acalanes students have access to the classes they need and desire, the number of students in a class varies between different subjects and courses. Acalanes administration works to accommodate all requests but are restricted by a total number of sections, or individual classes.

Some departments have larger class sizes than others, due to higher student demand in specific courses.

"This year, we have some classes, particularly in upper-division mathematics classes ... and in select other places where the classes are larger than they have been in the past," Acalanes Principal Eric Shawn said.

Many teachers notice an increase in their classes from previous years, especially in advanced-level classes for various subjects.

"I definitely am pretty full in the [Algebra 2 Precalculus Honors] classes. I have 41 and 39 students, which is significantly more than last year," Algebra 2 Precalculus Honors, Algebra 2, and Engineering and Applied Physics Honors teacher Misha Buchel said.

Students also observe large class sizes and notice the strain that crowded classrooms can put on students' work environments.

"My [Advanced Placement United States History] and Spanish [4] classes are large. Some people had to sit on the floor the first day. In Spanish several people had to sit at the teacher's desk. Classes definitely feel a lot bigger this year," junior Stella Pacheco said.

When determining which classes are larger than others, administrators focus on keeping general education classes smaller to prioritize necessities for graduation.

"It's been our priority to try to keep foundational classes, like Spanish 1, Algebra 1, [and] Geometry, as small as we can, legitimately within the contract, because those are where we're building those foundational skills to ensure students can access the essential curriculum that we guarantee for our students," Shawn said.

Each winter, students submit course request forms for the next school year, which kickstarts the creation of a master schedule for the following school year. At that point, the administration begins to determine the number of sections needed for each course.

"Based on [students'] course requests and our staffing ... we develop a master schedule that ensures the vast majority of students can access the classes they want," Shawn said. "So, in any of these scenarios with these really full ... classes, the outcome is that the majority of students are getting exactly what they want and need per their request."

Often, more students request a certain class than the number of seats allocated. The administration then has to determine if a class is crowded enough to create a new section while still considering finances.

"In those cases, ultimately the total number of students who were requesting classes was not enough to warrant ... that we build another section of [certain] classes. It's also important to consider every section [cost] is roughly $30,000," Shawn said.

For teachers, larger class sizes can have an impact on student activities in class and the amount of time teachers can dedicate to helping students one-on-one.

"I can't do the same 'out-of-our-seats' activities because there just isn't as much room to move around. It is also more difficult to make sure every student gets the teacher attention they need each period," Spanish 4 and human and social development teacher Monika Voellm said.

Additionally, teachers have observed a correlation between class size and student participation, along with differences in class environment, which can directly impact a student's experience.

"A smaller class tends to have a more re-

laxed environment and a more close-knit classroom community. I've noticed that in smaller classes, students feel more comfortable participating in group discussions. In language classes, it makes a big difference," Voellm said.

Students also notice the effect that overcrowding has on their in-class experience, as high ratios of students to a single teacher can impair learning experiences.

"When a classroom is too crowded, I find it's hard to get one-on-one time with the teacher, especially if you're struggling on a topic, and it can be really hard to find the time to get quality education on what you need," junior Oliver Stoneman said.

Some students feel the impact that overly large class sizes can have on the basic communication within a class that many find crucial to successful learning.

"It is hard to connect with the teachers. It is hard to learn because there are so many students, and you can't hear the teacher or hear the person next to you. When you have questions, you don't really have the opportunity to ask them," sophomore Claire Statton said.

While other teachers may not notice a big impact in the classroom culture, some feel the influence of larger class sizes in their day-to-day work.

"It doesn't change the dynamic of teaching, but it changes the other things I have to do like how much time it takes to check the homework from everybody or to grade the quizzes I gave or the tests I am giving," Buchel said.

Additionally, classroom spaces across Acalanes vary from room to room and because of this, it can be hard to determine whether a class will feel overcrowded or not.

"We have some suggested solutions for [highly populated classes], including room sharing and going to larger rooms where they are available, and teachers have that opportunity should they want to take us up on those options," Shawn said.

A teacher's contract determines the maximum number of contacts a teacher can have in total. However, there is no maximum number of students per section. Contracts refer to the total number of students that a teacher will interact with daily and for Acalanes, this is the number that ultimately dictates class sizes and teaching schedules.

"If we had a class size cap, we would start to end up with situations where we would have an overall average [of students] per class down to 25 when it should be 30, and when you start to do that across all disciplines, that gets problematic. It is not only a cost, in terms of maintaining competitive teacher salaries, but also [a matter of] space. We run at close to capacity," Buchel said.

As a result of having different teacher's unions in each school district, there is no one way in which class sizes are determined. For some districts, teachers and administration agree on maximum class sizes, and in others, such as Acalanes, that is not the case.

"Our contract with the teachers' union defines what the class average should be per teacher based on the department they teach in and the total number of student contracts that they could have over the course of a day," Shawn said.

In some larger schools, courses have more sections every period, meaning that students have more flexibility in the classes they are placed in. This allows them to make adjustments to their schedule, while overall class sizes remain smaller.

"Our schools are very small. It doesn't seem like it, but it is compared to schools that have 5,000 students. You end up with a lot more situations like this where you have unbalanced class sizes just because you don't have the scale of a school that is that size with wiggle room on where to place students," Buchel said.

The way schools typically ease overcrowded classes is through creating new sections and hiring more teachers. However, Acalanes' funds, which includes federal, state, and Lafayette Partners in Education (LPIE) funding, only have the potential to support so many sections and instructors.

As a result of COVID-19, the school received numerous one-time federal funds that have proved crucial to the Acalanes Union High School District's (AUHSD) funding for classes and programs over the past few years. These funds helped pay for sections and materials that Acalanes may not have the money for now.

"They [AUHSD] have been relying for many years on these one-time funds to pay for ongoing programs. So the Acalanes Union High School District continues to deficit spend," LPIE Executive Director Danielle Gallagher said.

Another source of financial support comes from the California government. State funding fluctuates across districts, and for a variety of reasons, some school districts receive more per-student funding than others.

"Acalanes gets about $19,000 per student. That is with the help of local taxes, [Lafayette] parcel taxes, and LPIE foundation support. [But if you] go across the Bay [to] Palo Alto they are getting about $30,000 per student because of how the state allocates the funds," Gallagher said.

While Acalanes does have substantial funding, the district still falls behind in the national average when it comes to per-student funding.

"Even with [a parcel tax] that allows for greater funding, that still doesn't mean that we are adequately funded, especially compared to states across the country," Buchel said.

Throughout the funding process, LPIE is in close communication with the AUHSD. The process begins with a proposal to LPIE before they work to gather donations and meet the necessary items the AUHSD requests. After a series of revisions, LPIE approves the budget. Most of what LPIE funds are the staff required to teach or guide courses and students. This includes salaries, classroom budgets, and other necessities.

"Each of those sections cost approximately $25,000, so this year LPIE is being asked to fund 17 sections, or teacher salaries, at Acalanes High School," Gallagher said. "Teacher and staff salaries make up 83 percent of what LPIE funds."

Although classes appear overcrowded, LPIE attempts lighten the financial burden and create smaller class sizes along with a broader range of subjects.

"If LPIE didn't fund any of those sections at all, those students would still be in the school, so they would be smooshed into other classes so the class number would go way up, 17 sections times 30," Gallagher said.

Despite funding limitations, Acalanes works to tackle the puzzle of creating class schedules that enable students to access the classes they need, even if that may result in crowded class sizes occasionally.

"[Varying class sizes] help us have this student-centered scheduling because kids' days flow through different teachers, and they want different things happening," Shawn said. "To ensure we have the right number of classes for all the students who want them, sometimes that means one class might have 35 kids in it, but their other classes might have fewer kids in it."

# Meet the New Faces of Faculty

*Profiling new teachers for the 2024-2025 academic year*

Jack Gebhardt, Aamena Shipchandler, Noah Frankel, and Trevor Krick | Head Copy Editor, Print News Editor, and Staff Writers

Photos by Cade McAlister | Head of Photography

As the 2024-2025 school year kicks off, students adjust to their new schedules and get to know their teachers and classes. This year, ten new teachers joined the Acalanes community in their respective subjects and courses.

**Adam Garcia - Advanced Placement (AP) United States History (APUSH) and Government and Economics**

After dedicating time serving in the Coast Guard, Garcia charted a new course by deciding to pursue teaching history.

"I chose to become a teacher while I was still in the military. I knew I didn't want to stay in the Coast Guard as my career, and I already graduated with a bachelor's in history ... I looked at a couple of different options ... and I kept coming back to teaching. I've always enjoyed training people [and] the process of taking somebody that didn't know how to do something and working with them until they were able to do it on their own," Garcia said.

Before coming to Acalanes, Garcia taught in Los Angeles and spent two years teaching AP World History at Golden Valley High School in Santa Clarita. This year, he is teaching APUSH and Government and Economics for the first time.

"The school culture is very positive, which is fun to be a part of as a newcomer. And the other thing would be the students, who are very motivated, very knowledgeable, very capable, which makes my job fun. We can get into some higher level things ... so I don't have to do much explaining to talk about an interesting subject because [the students] are already informed," Garcia said.

**Andie Case - Geometry and Algebra 2**

Case was born in Maryland and moved to Delaware to attend college and begin her teaching career. After teaching for one year in Portland, Oregon, and working for one year as a substitute teacher in Orange County, Case now teaches Geometry and Algebra 2 at Acalanes.

"There's a strong sense of community in the area but also in the schools ... The teachers are very collaborative and that is something I look for in a job ... just the way the school functions from a team and community lens is really what made me want to work here," Case said.

Case often spends her weekends with her dog Monaco at the beach, playing soccer and paddle boarding. Both in and out of the classroom, Case tries to maintain a positive attitude, especially with her mindset towards teaching.

"I think that categorization and the perspective you have of yourself really does affect the way you show up in your classes ... What I'm really passionate about as a teacher is to intercept that perception and really help kids step out of any negative box that they have put themselves in and show them that there are opportunities for them to have success in math," Case said.

**Catherine Granskog - English 2**

Granskog decided to pursue teaching in college, given the opportunity to gain her teaching credential. After teaching in Oregon for the past few years, Granskog chose to teach at Acalanes.

"I went to school at the University of Portland and they have it so you can get both your degree and your credential in the same four years. So that was pretty handy for me. I started my teaching career with student teaching at Tigard High School in Tigard, Oregon. [Then] I taught in North Salem High School for a little while which was really fun," Granskog said.

After graduating from Las Lomas High School and moving to Oregon, Granskog settled back into the Bay Area community after years away. She recognizes and appreciates certain aspects about Acalanes as she begins her first year as a Don.

"Everybody here is so kind, so friendly ... and everybody is so polite. Everybody says thank you when they leave and I've never had that before as a teacher so that's been really fun. And then everybody's parents are so involved. We didn't even have back to school night at my old school because people were busy and they couldn't really come, so it was really nice to be able to meet all of the community as well," Granskog said.

**Dr. Mark Foster - French 4 Honors and AP French 5**

Dr. Foster majored in seven different subjects in college, one being French. Prior to teaching French at Acalanes and Miramonte High School, Dr. Foster taught English and later French at a high school in Connecticut.

"I applied to New York University (NYU) and got accepted ... to go to their NYU in Paris program. I was only supposed to be there for three courses in the summer and then the fall semester another three. I [stayed in Paris] for six years. Then I moved back to work on my doc-

torate at the University of Connecticut and became a French teacher [as] it just seemed like the thing to do. Ever since, I have been a French teacher," Dr. Foster said.

Dr. Foster enjoys traveling and collecting *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in the language of each country he visits. As a language enthusiast, Dr. Foster also spends time studying new languages of the places he visits in preparation for his travels.

"Everywhere I go, I spend four or five months studying that language. We went to Zanzibar a few years ago, and I did a lot of work in Swahili and just made so much more contact with the [people]. I have a collection of Harry Potter [books and] I'm up to 64 or 65 languages," Dr. Foster said.

**Elizabeth Barré - French 2**

Barré grew up surrounded by languages and various cultures, receiving the majority of her education in Paris.

"I was born in Venezuela. But I grew up in France, I was a year old when we moved there ... I did all of school, high school, and part of college in Paris ... then I moved to the United States, and went to Saint Mary's College," Barré said.

Barré speaks French, English, Spanish, and Italian, and translated her knowledge of language and enthusiasm for educating others into becoming a teacher. After college, Barré worked as a French and Spanish teacher at Alhambra High School for 15 years. Three years ago, she moved to Las Lomas and now, currently teaches at both Las Lomas and Acalanes, where she teaches French 1 through 5.

"[At Acalanes], I got to know the students really fast. I mean, it's only been a few weeks, and the kids are such good kids. I really enjoy coming here to teach because of them ... and [the Associated Student Body] students were really thoughtful by giving the new teachers a plant, which ... I really appreciated a lot," Barré said.

**Jamie Rogers - Learning Skills**

Rogers discovered an interest in education at a young age, which she has now been pursuing for almost ten years.

"I found a letter from when I was in fourth grade where I said that I want to be a teacher because I really want to help people and I like talking to people. I knew from a young age that this was going to be something that might work for me ... About four months into [teaching] I absolutely fell in love with it. I fell in love with [Special Education] in general and the environment," Rogers said.

Rogers began her career as an Instructional Assistant (IA) at Acalanes but moved to Miramonte High School for eight years. She is now returning to Acalanes after almost a decade to teach Learning Skills for the first time.

"My first year of being an [IA] was actually in the classroom right next door at Acalanes, in the 2015-2016 school year ... I still have my ID card from the first year, and that was my first time ever in a classroom. It felt like coming home a little bit to end up back here, and especially to end up right next door to the class I started in when I was young and had no idea what I was doing," Rogers said.

**Natasha Morsey - English 2**

Morsey grew up in Moraga, attending school in the nearby area. She was a piano major in college before she switched to an English major. She now returns back to the Lamorinda community as an English teacher.

"I grew up not far from Lafayette, so just being a part of the community again was really important," Morsey said.

Morsey's experiences as a student led her to pursue a teaching career and give back to the community by supporting the next generation of students.

"I had teachers who were really there for me and encouraged me to pursue my goals, and so being able to give back to the community that way is important to me ... I'm just excited to be here, and I'm happy to work with the students. I think all of the students are putting in amazing efforts, so I'm glad to be there for them," Morsey said.

**Ning Ji - Mandarin Chinese 1-5**

Ji grew up in the city of Harbin, located in China's Heilongjiang province. As a child, her mother and grandmother both led careers as teachers in China, inspiring her career in education.

"I always wanted to be a Chinese teacher, even when I was a kid. So I got my bachelor's degree in China, majoring in teaching Chinese as a second language, and I got my master's degree at Michigan State University, majoring in teaching and curriculum," Ji said.

Ji has taught Mandarin for the past 11 years, both in the United States and internationally. After taking a break from teaching to raise her newborn, she decided it was time to return to her career.

"Around [COVID-19], I worked at Las Lomas, and then I [went on maternity leave]. So I was taking care of my baby for three years ... and I really, really [missed] teaching so much. [Last year] the previous [Mandarin] teacher, Du Laoshi ... retired. So I [felt] like now is my opportunity to go back to work and enjoy my teaching life," Ji said.

**Spencer Hight - Algebra 1 and Geometry**

Spencer Hight was a videogame designer before he became a teacher. With encouragement from his mom, he became a substitute, and eventually a full time math teacher. In his free time, Hight loves to practice fencing and participate in fencing duels.

"The exciting [hobby] that I keep getting questions about is [that] I fence on the weekends ... Two-handed longsword fencing," Hight said.

Before coming to Acalanes, Hight's experience in Scouts helped to develop his love for teaching. Hight saw the same unity and teamwork from Boy Scouts in Acalanes, and was drawn to it.

"The biggest thing that stood out to me about Acalanes is just how supportive everyone is in the team here, and everyone works together for everything. Teachers, admin, students, all working towards the common goal, and just a lot more collaboration between everyone," Hight said.

**Blueprint *reached out to Jason Dukes, the new Autoshop teacher, who declined an interview. Dr. Mark Foster, Jamie Rogers, and Natasha Morsey did not send photos***

# News Briefs

Aamena Shipchandler | Print News Editor
Spread by Haley Chelemedos | Print Managing Editor and Print Head of Layout

## Homecoming

As homecoming season rolls around again, students got into spirit in the days leading up to and during homecoming week on Sept. 9 through Sept. 21.

The annual canned food drive kicked off the beginning of homecoming events on Sept. 9. All four grades donated cans or money to support the Contra Costa Food Bank, trying to break the 2023 record of 40,000 cans donated.

On Sept. 15, students and other community volunteers decorated their respective hallways following their classes theme. The hallways were viewed by the Acalanes community and graded to win homecoming points.

Monday Sept. 16 marked the official beginning of homecoming week, with a pink-out dress-up and a pink carnival at lunch on the cabbage patch. The next day, students wore their cowboy boots and hats for the country dress up and played musical chairs at lunch. On Wednesday Sept 18, Dons dressed up like Adam Sandler and played student-staff kickball in the gym at lunch, before showing up for student dodgeball later that night. Students dressed up in their beach-gear for school on Thursday, heading to the student-staff potluck at lunch and the LatinX potluck in the afternoon.

Finally, homecoming week culminated in the homecoming rally on Friday Sept 20. where students performed their homecoming skits in academy, went to innertube water polo at lunch, and showed up and showed out to the homecoming football game that evening. The grade with the most homecoming points will be announced at the football game halftime show.

## Fall Club Day

Acalanes held its first club day of the year during Academy in the front quad on Sept. 6. Prior to the event, on Aug. 21, leadership held a club day meeting for those interested in continuing a club from last year or creating a new one. This year, a total of 77 clubs had tables for students to check out and visit during lunch throughout the week.

On club day, clubs ranging from the Archery club to Youth Helping Youth and everything in between advertised booths with information, sign-up details, and prizes for students interested in participating. Students walked around the tables and learned about each club from club officers, and signed up for any club they were interested in.

"It was super fun to see the variety of clubs and all the opportunities we have to get involved. There was something for everyone and it was cool to see everyone come together and sign up for different clubs," junior Piper Coy said.

B.

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# DEIB Debriefs

## Zinnia Khan | DEIB Director

Hello, my name is Zinnia Khan and I'm *Blueprint's* Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Director. DEIB Debriefs is a column that I hope to use to spread awareness about DEIB issues as they relate to the Acalanes Campus.

**Bisexuality Awareness Week**

Bisexuality Awareness Week is Sept. 16 through Sept. 23, a period dedicated to supporting and recognizing Bisexual people across the globe. The International Lesbian and Gay Association Conference was the first to recognize Bisexuality Awareness Week in 1999. According to a 2022 Gallup survey, of the 5.5 percent of Americans who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, 57 percent indicate they are bisexual. Thus, many students at Acalanes recognize the importance of acknowledging those who identify as such.

"There is a lot more visibility about gay and lesbian as sexualities, but bisexuality is less focused on, and there are a lot of people who identify as bisexual," Queer Student Alliance (QSA) Co-President and senior Ash Lee said.

Acalanes' QSA is a club that meets on campus with the goal of supporting students in the LGBTQ+ community. They intend to provide a safe space for students of every sexual orientation during Bisexuality Awareness Week.

"We often hold discussions about topics like sexuality, something [students] might benefit from partaking in. They may also just feel a benefit being around other queer students, and many of them are bi themselves," Lee said.

**First Month of African American Studies Class**

Starting this school year, Acalanes offers two periods of Advanced Placement African American Studies (APAAS). The introduction of this course is not school-specific, as each school in the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) introduced the course for the first time this school year. At Acalanes, Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) teacher Bruno Morlan* teaches the class. Morlan teaches two periods of APAAS with 61 students divided between them. The class is open to interested sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

The AP Exam for APAAS differs from that of other AP history classes such as APUSH or AP European History, as ten percent of the grade is based on an Individual Research Project that students complete and present in class. Each APAAS teacher grades their students' presentations, and The College Board then factors that grade into their AP Exam score.

At Acalanes, APAAS students appreciate the nuanced learning opportunities that the course offers them.

"The class environment is welcoming to students. Usually, when any topic related to Black history was brought up I felt awkward and uncomfortable because people always stared at me. However, in this class, none of these feelings occur since everyone has chosen to take part in this curriculum," Black Student Union President and senior Elijah Williams said.

*Blueprint *would like to acknowledge that Bruno Morlan is an Advisor for* Blueprint.

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# Empowering the Future of Female Entrepreneurs

*Local non-profit inspires girls in Lamorinda to pursue entrepreneurship*

Audrey Tugade, Sydney Scovic, and James Hanzel | Staff Writers

Brimming with creativity and ambition, elementary school youth experience a world with endless possibilities. However, by the time girls reach eight years old, they experience a 30 percent decline in confidence as Time Magazine reports. Girls Crushing It is just one of the many organizations dedicated to combating this trend.

Girls Crushing It is a Lamorinda nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering and teaching young girls entrepreneurial skills. Through the use of training programs, community events, and popups, Girls Crushing It hopes to provide participants, ages eight to 18, with the skills necessary to create and run their own businesses.

Girls Crushing It Chief Executive Officer Roxanne Christophe founded the program in 2018 when her two kids, now students at Miramonte High School, began a small start up selling paper origami products.

"[My children] had so much fun doing that, and they had so much confidence after," Christophe said. "We put a note on Facebook [for selling at the farmers market], and more than 50 kids signed up. We were instantly bigger than the farmer's market. And I said this is clearly something that there is demand for."

To help prepare for the future, Girls Crushing It teaches young girls entrepreneurship skills to build strong foundation to pursue their goals.

"At a young age, we are so much more open to opportunities, and as people get a little bit older, sometimes their confidence can wane. While children are youthful and excited, it's a great time for them to test out their entrepreneurial aspirations where the stakes are not as high," Christophe said.

Over six years of female mentorship and teaching entrepreneurial skills, the organization has served over 5,000 female entrepreneurs and sold products to over 15,000 community members.

"It's very empowering for young girls that grow up doing Girls Crushing It to see past participants lead very successful and proud couriers," Stanley eighth grader Avery Deily said.

Using the skills she gained from Girls Crushing it, Avery Deily launched her own business: The Colorful Wild. Her brand is entirely self-made and is sold by local businesses including Venture in Lafayette.

"I learned how to be a better communicator with adults and strangers as well as being more confident and presentable when doing stuff that isn't as casual as everything else that I do. I found out how a job is at a young age, the expectations, the experience needed, and I had a lot of fun while doing it," Avery Deily said.

Girls Crushing It puts its training program into action through the use of popup shops, which often make an appearance at community events such as the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival, which the city is holding on Sept. 21 and Sept. 22. The Lafayette Art and Wine Festival is an annual outdoor festival that hosted more than 85,000 visitors in 2023 and features booths of handmade crafts, food from local restaurants, and music stages.

This year, more than 80 Girls Crushing It entrepreneurs will be participating in the festival, selling products ranging from housewares and pet supplies to handmade jewelry and art.

"It is so fun to see young families excited to show their children what local teens and tweens are doing. We also love seeing the parents and the young entrepreneurs marketing themselves and their presence at the Festival. Everyone is so excited to participate," Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Communication Director Holly Sonne said.

For many participants in the Girls Crushing It program, the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival offers a great opportunity to gain practice in business interactions.

"[Girls Crushing It] helped me get a running start for my business. At first, I only sold at school to a couple friends but when I did the Girls Crushing It booth at the Art and Wine Festival, it helped me gain customers and experience with selling in person," frosh Ella Garofalo said.

*Blueprint* Graphic/Bo Chevaleau

Girls Crushing It aims to transform their booths into immersive educational experiences for all attendees, offering interactive demonstrations, insightful presentations, and hands-on activities that highlight the skills and creativity of their young entrepreneurs.

"We want to make sure that visitors are taking away educational lessons because there's so much opportunity for them to learn from our young entrepreneurs as they move through our space," Christophe said.

Women in business often face significant challenges, including gender bias, unequal funding, and barriers to leadership positions. According to Harvard Business Review, women hold only four percent of executive-level management roles despite making up 18 percent of the workforce.

As Girl's Crushing It aims to continue to support its mission of helping young girls build valuable entrepreneurial skills, they hope to inspire more people to place support in female entrepreneurs and their businesses.

"Entrepreneurship empowers women to take control of their financial futures and create opportunities for themselves and others. Supporting women in entrepreneurship not only helps address gender imbalances but also strengthens communities," owner and Principal Designer of Douglah Designs Leila Douglah said.

Feature

# Building Financially Fit Futures

## *Financial literacy and beyond the classroom skillsets*

Cedric He, Maddyx Bride, and Gwyneth Lee | Online Head of Layout, Head Copy Editor, and Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Graphic/Sof Cerruti

A teenager sits in their room, excitedly clutching their first paycheck. Yet that excitement soon fades away as they notice a percentage of their earnings is missing. The teen stares at the small cuts to their money, trying to understand the various taxes that have chipped away from their paycheck.

As more and more teens enter the workforce, many educators and students alike stress the need for critical financial knowledge and skills, from learning how to budget one's income, to distinguishing between negative and positive debt. Beyond financial literacy, practical "life skill" classes that involve hands-on activity continue to impact students' future careers.

Financial literacy is a broad term that includes understanding and applying financial knowledge to make informed decisions about money. This can range from knowing how to budget one's income to managing bank accounts and paying bills. Financial literacy focuses on how people handle money on a daily basis.

"I think everybody should have financial literacy. It is one of the most underestimated and one of the most important things you can know. And the earlier you are familiar with those concepts around money and finance, the better," SCS Financials CEO Tony Abbiati said.

Financial literacy often consists of skills that are not prioritized in school due to limited time and space in the curriculum.

"The basic things that amazingly don't come natural to everybody and don't get taught in schools. Everything we do in life costs money and we all have to manage a budget so it is kind of an irony that it doesn't get taught in schools at a young age. I think it is super important for people to understand money," Abbiati said.

Acalanes currently does not offer a class dedicated to financial literacy and some students have expressed their desire towards greater access to financial education through specialized courses and electives.

"I definitely think schools should offer more classes on financial literacy. I don't see any downsides to it. I think financial algebra classes should be more accessible, investing classes, and even classes that teach you about taxes and budgeting," Trader Joe's employee and senior Charlotte Sutherland said.

To address this demand, both educators and students are hopeful for new courses and electives that can help teens build connections between the school curriculum and the real world. Many are also advocating for a specialized financial literacy class that would help educate students on taxes, investing, choosing a medical plan, and more.

"I think it should be taught in schools. The short answer for that is I think there are a lot of things that are taught in schools that are way less important than the basic knowledge of the power of saving and the power of managing a budget and the value of a dollar," Abbiati said. "I've never understood why they weren't taught in schools, and frankly, I wish I was taught that at a much younger age."

Some Acalanes teachers even take it upon themselves to educate their students on matters of financial literacy, by working to make real world examples from the math curriculum.

"When I get to a point in a class where I'm talking about exponential functions, I use that as an opportunity to teach about the power of compounding interest for, saving for retirement," Algebra 2 Precalculus Honors teacher Misha Buchel said. "I felt it was important to communicate this to my students, so that when they get that first real professional job that they'll sign up for ... either [a] 401k, if that's offered by their employer, or some other retirement savings vehicle, to help secure their retirement sources of income."

Amidst the growing demand for greater financial literacy programs on campus by students and staff, classes that help teach practical life skills through hands-on activities may also support their goals.

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) currently offers a selection of life-skill classes, including Auto Shop, Woodshop, 3D Art and Design & Fabrication. However, the district has gradually reduced this selection over the years in response to decreasing demand and the aim to accommodate new classes. Career Tech-ED accredited classes primarily focus on building practical life skills through applied design, fabrication, and hands-on activities.

"[In Design and Fabrication], we look at, 'how do you take an idea to come up with a design that's buildable, that's actionable, that's efficient, that uses materials wisely'. And then the second part of that is, 'how do you take your design and actually make it?' ... It's that process of [developing] an idea [into] an actual physical object that we're trying to show students," Design and Fabrication teacher Dan Appel said.

These classes also offer opportunities for students to work with real-world sce-

narios of their choice. This is intended to encourage self-exploration and to give students the chance to apply the skill sets they've learned to personal hobbies and other areas of interest.

"Last year, we built in some independent project time for students that had something that they wanted to explore, which I think is different compared to other classes ... I think how it translates to [a] real world setting is [students are] given a task ... and at the end of the day, [they are] going to give me a physical product that needs to match what [they are] trying to do," Appel said.

Many of the skills gained from these classes may also carry entrepreneurial value, as students can take in-class projects and turn them into businesses outside of school.

"Part of the applied component gets a sense of, 'what do things cost, what does it cost to make something, what did you sell it for?' Looking at that production, if you could take a raw material and really add value to it with skills that you own, you can make a business from that," Appel said.

Teaching financial literacy in schools has the potential to help standardize this knowledge and ensure that all teenagers have access to financial education to prepare them better for the future.

"It is known that the knowledge of how to best work the system has been kept out of the hands of marginalized peoples. Thus, it is not a surprise that financial literacy is a skill that is only taught to people that are viewed to need it in their future, while guarding the information from those who are seen as undeserving of it. [Financial] knowledge is selectively dispersed in order to uphold a discriminatory system," Community Education Partnerships Program Coordinator Jana Lee said.

Today, a greater proportion of teens are in the work force. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in June 2024, 5.7 million teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 held jobs, marking the highest teen employment rate since 2007.

Teens enter the workforce for a number of factors, including the opportunity to gain work experience while also earning money to pay for necessities, higher education, and various other reasons.

"[My] job has prepared me for entering the workforce because I work shifts that range from four to eight hours, I have many responsibilities, and have learned many skills like managing my schedule and working with others ... My biggest financial goal is to save up for college. I have reached some goals such as paying for my phone and even my own car, which took a lot of effort and budgeting," Sutherland said.

Teens with newly established incomes are often uncertain about where to allocate their money and what to spend versus save.

"My biggest challenge would probably be not to do the wrong thing with my money. I was [never] really taught the wrong and right [ways to use] my money. I just made [certain] choices," sophomore Zach Isaacs said.

Many experts argue that teenagers have a tendency to focus on spending now and saving later, which may mean that they do not save money early in their working years

"[Teenagers] spending all their money is the biggest [issue] ... It's this notion of, 'I have the money, therefore I can spend the money.' And shifting that [mentality] to 'I have the money, hopefully I don't have to spend the money so that I can save it.' And that's something teenagers are not always taught," Abbiati said.

Experts stress that saving money early can be beneficial in the long run, especially for larger financial purchases in the future.

"If when [you were 19 years old] you put $1000 in the bank and did that for the next couple of summers, you'd get out of college and actually have real money. You'd have a nest egg, a back stone, and it's the smallest thing, but if you are struggling to pay for rent, or you want to lease a car, you now have a place to go if you need to borrow some money for this and that," Abbiati said.

Educators examining the level of financial literacy in students also look at topics like debt and credit. To open up a credit card, a teen must first choose from a wide range of banks and credit unions. From there, they must choose the right credit card based on their planned spending amount, gather the necessary personal information, fill out an application, and obtain approval before they can start using their card.

"Some [teens] don't know that there is such a thing as good debt and avoid borrowing altogether. Under specific circumstances, we can actually view borrowing as investing, [especially] when [the] loan increases your productivity, education, transportation, and even products or services that improve your health. [By doing so] you can expect your income to rise as a result of having these things," youth financial literacy nonprofit MyFly President Paul Mackay said.

Additionally, many adults find insurance expenses an all-pervasive and even obligatory part of adulthood, whether it is home, car, or life insurance. This is also combined with the complexity of analyzing numerous insurance options filled with endless choices of premiums and deductibles, which can create a barrier from teens wanting or being able to learn more about their finances.

"The terminology that comes along with [insurance] and the fact that there are so many types of insurance [makes] it seem more complicated than it actually is. Understanding your own needs and risks and what insurance plans fit you best, as well as how to actually make a claim and deal with disputes, can help clear up a lot of confusion," Mackay said.

For Acalanes students, many want to know more about investment opportunities for their incomes. For instance, many teen workers were unaware of retirement investment programs such as Roth Individual Retirement (IRA), a retirement savings account that allows individuals to contribute after-tax income and enjoy tax-free growth on their investments.

"I wish I knew more about investing. I want to know more about how to invest in retirement accounts and how to open accounts with high interest rates. I don't think a lot of people know the importance of these accounts, even me, and the earlier you start, the better," Sutherland said.

Expanding access to financial literacy and practical life skills education can provide students with essential tools for managing finances and navigating real-world challenges. As the school district considers these demands, they have the opportunity to offer courses that address the needs of all students, preparing them for life beyond the classroom.

"[These courses] would make people more financially literate. You need to know things like taxes, and how to invest, and bitcoin, and all of these things where as an adult, you're supposed to learn but it would be so much easier if you learned it when you were 16. So, I think it would be great for the community. I think it would be great for everybody involved," Academic Counselor Marissa Meadows said.

# Gallacher's Gist: Masked Misogyny

*Evaluating bias when referring to women in politics*

Molly Connelly and Grace Gallacher | Print Feature Editor and Opinion Copy Editor

Spread by Bo Chevaleau | Head of Graphics

A young girl sits in front of her TV, eyes fixed on the speaker. In the background, she hears a sigh from her parent, who changes the channel to reporters discussing the woman's speech. They refer to her the same way the girl refers to all of her friends– by her first name.

When President Joe Biden announced his withdrawal from the presidential campaign on July 21, Vice President Kamala Harris became the presumptive Democratic Presidential Candidate after Biden's endorsement, and she officially accepted the Democratic Nomination on August 22. However, many people have observed that throughout her Vice Presidential term and time as the democratic candidate, Americans and the media alike refer to Vice President Harris as "Kamala."

According to a 2023 Pew Research study, most Americans do not think that a female president would perform any better or worse than their male counterparts. Yet, they do notice discrepancies in how the media depicts men and women running for the same political positions.

For much of the nation's history, men have often dominated the political scene. However, even though women would not gain the right to vote for another half-century, in 1872, Victoria Woodhull became the first female nominated as a presidential candidate by the Equal Rights Party. Woodhull faced intense backlash from both men and women across the country, as many rejected her presidential attempt and did not take it seriously. She even spent election day in jail. Considering Woodhull's experience, misogyny within the political sphere is a long-standing problem.

The issue does not end with general citizens; it extends into public discourse as well. In a 2019 *New York Times* article about politicians' stances on universal healthcare, they referred to Vice President Harris, a United States Senator at the time, as "Ms. Harris" twice. In contrast, they referred to Senator Bernie Sanders by his proper title of "Senator Sanders." Per the New York Times' strict protocol for news, an article undergoes several rounds of editing, yet it violated basic protocol, which some may argue was a result of gender bias.

While laws and social practices have historically prevented women from becoming politicians themselves, women have always been figures in the political sphere as First Ladies. While they help their spouses' campaign and attend promotional events, many First Ladies also experience backlash, despite not being politicians themselves.

In December 2020, *The Wall Street* Journal published an editorial piece that asked Dr. Jill Biden to not refer to herself as "Dr. Jill Biden," calling the name "fraudulent" and "even comic," despite the fact that she holds a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree from the University of Delaware. This sparked not only a discussion about the validity of an academic doctorate, but whether the author's opinion was due to the First Lady's gender. Despite the backlash, Dr. Biden responded to this opinion, stating that "One of the things [she] is most proud of is [her] doctorate" and continues to address herself as Dr. Biden, her proper title.

Gender bias in politics is not just perpetuated by the media and citizens, but by political opponents as well. According to *The Week*, in his campaigns for presidency, Former President Donald Trump has referred to various female opponents as "dogs" and "people with low IQ." Such commentary can project the sexist stereotype that men are smarter than women.

One strategy some suggest to shift public opinion and impact media perception of female politicians is to normalize their contribution through a positive feedback loop. According to a study from *Ballard Brief*, female politicians that hold high office often motivate other women to enter politics. According to that same study, they found that if women see more female politicians in higher offices, they are likely to learn more about politics and become educated voters. This is significant because women historically vote at higher rates than men.

While experiences of female politicians and misogyny in the political sphere have improved since Victoria Woodhull ran for office, Vice President Harris' role in the upcoming election has the potential to bring even greater positive change– change that truly promotes equality. Vice President Harris' election may pave the way for the media as well as other politicians to address women in power with the respect they deserve.

# Local Government Briefs

Sameed Marco and Saaj Shah | Online Content Manager and Online Editor

## City Council

The Lafayette City Council held one of its bimonthly meetings on Aug. 12. The public can access the meeting's minutes, agenda, and audio on the City of Lafayette website, and the Council posts a livestream of the meeting on the City of Lafayette's Youtube Channel. Community members can also virtually join the meeting on Zoom through the city website.

The council opened the meeting with a closed session followed by public comments. Many public commenters thanked the council for the completion of public projects over the summer such as the Briones parking lot, speeding signs, and road renovations. Mike Hayes ended public comment proposing committee-supported efforts to educate residents on Artificial Intelligence media literacy.

After public comments, City manager Niroop Srivatsa gave an update on all city departments. The council closed discussing Lafayette's Tree Protection Ordinance (TPO), a 20-year program that seeks to protect native trees, and research on Lafayette's trees that reported a decline in the density of canopies and how forest fires spread in the area. The TPO staff recommended amendments to the ordinance for protecting trees against new construction and seasonal fires. The council and planning commission underscored examining the trees' fiscal value before approving the amendment.

## Governing Board

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board held meetings on Aug. 7 and Aug. 21, inviting student representatives from all five schools to provide updates on recent site events and activities, followed by Governing Board members who spoke about recent district updates and changes. The public can access the meeting by attending in person or through a live broadcast on the AUHSD website.

The meeting opened with public comment, and after Acalanes Education Association (AEA) President Lori Tewksbury reported on campus events that kicked off the school year.

Next, the AUHSD governing board updated several policies to clarify guidelines on sharing student information with educational foundations. They also updated work permit criteria and parent involvement in Title 1 schools. The revisions also incorporate new laws on disciplinary actions, graduation requirements for populations with special circumstances, and workplace violence prevention. Additionally, the Board noted how the number of seniors from the four comprehensive high schools who report enrollment in post-secondary institutions has consistently stayed high over the last four years, averaging between 96 percent and 97 percent. According to the report, a variety of University of California campuses, California State Universities, and other esteemed private and out-of-state universities are among the most sought-after locations for AUHSD students.

Additionally, the AUHSD Board discussed the usage of funds from Proposition 28, which allows the District to improve its Visual and Performing Arts programs by adding more courses, lowering student-teacher ratios, hiring music coaches with specialized training, and helping to maintain and operate Performing Arts facilities.

On Aug. 21, the AUHSD Board meeting opened acknowledging the four recipients of the 2023-2024 Su Stauffer Friends of Education Award. In recognition of Su Stauffer, who promoted music and arts education throughout the state during lean economic times in the 1970s, the AUHSD annually honors community members for their unwavering commitment to the district and its students.

The AUHSD honored Kelly Daggs, Acalanes Parent Club President, for her positivity, thoughtfulness, and attention to detail, Wendy Smith, a volunteer in the Moreira District, for her 16 years of dedicated volunteer work and committed leadership, Alissa Lillie, Miramonte Parents club Parliamentarian, for outstanding volunteer effort and leadership in revamping the Miramonte High School's important areas, and Kristin Connelly*, AUHSD governing board member, for loyal service on the District's Governing Board and supporting its students for the past five years.

Following the commendation, the Board reviewed the Acalanes High School kitchen expansion project, which the District hired GCCI, Inc. on March 20, 2024 for $115,528.

Additionally, the AUHSD Board discussed Heritage and Awareness Month resolutions. The conversation was part of an annual review for various awareness and heritage months where the Board outlines the District's approach for celebrating culture, promoting inclusion, and addressing societal injustices. Later, staff reviewed the 2024 Summer School Program, examining enrollment, completion rates, budget details, and the effectiveness of the algebra readiness program for incoming 9th graders.

*Blueprint *would like to acknowledge that Kristin Connelly's daughter, Molly Connelly, is part of the* Blueprint *staff.*

# Dialing Back on Classroom Tech

## Examining the evolution of high school cell phone policies

Cameron Powell, Zinnia Khan, and Hannah Geraghty | Online Editor-in-Chief, DEIB Director, and Business Manager

Spreads by Justin Rosenblatt | Senior Graphics Manager

*Due to the sensitive nature of the phone policy's mandation, one source chose to remain anonymous. They are quoted as Anonymous parent.*

A cell phone buzzes amidst a quiet classroom, and all eyes jump to the source of the disturbance. However, instead of zeroing in on the guilty-looking student, the class is staring at a grid of cell phones hanging against the whiteboard.

Acalanes High School enters their second year of restricted cell phone usage during instructional periods. Unlike previous mandation, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) takes a more active role in ensuring that classrooms across the District enforce the policy. While some look forward to class dynamics transforming, others think schools may be overstepping their authority.

Although nations across the globe have successfully adopted legislation restricting phone usage in schools for years, the United States did not follow suit until May of 2023 when Florida enacted a state-wide K-12 phone ban. Beyond banning at-school phone usage, the law requires schools to disable access to social media sites on their WiFi and mandates that districts provide students with information on how social media manipulates behavior.

Other states have since followed with similar laws, including South Carolina and Louisiana. Louisiana's Act 313 bans students from using their phones during school hours. According to the law, students who bring their phone to school must turn the device off and cannot bring it out until after school. Several other states including Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, and Virginia have required districts to create a policy that restricts phone use as well.

California may soon follow suit. While current state legislation recommends that schools limit or restrict students' phone use, California legislators passed AB-3216 on Aug. 24, a bill that, if Governor Gavin Newsom signs it, would change the guidelines from a recommendation to a requirement.

"We expect [the bill] to be passed, [but] I don't know if that will lead to any changes in our policy or not, so we'll evaluate that when that happens," AUHSD Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said. "The governor could end up vetoing it because there are some that argue that [the topic] should be a local school district decision, not a state level decision."

In August of 2024, Governor Newsom requested that school districts restrict phone usage during school hours. This request follows his 2019 signing of AB 272, which gave California school districts authority to control phone usage at schools.

AB 272 came amidst research and studies demonstrating phones' impact on active engagement, learning retention, and social dynamics in classroom environments. The bill cites that phone usage at school "lowers pupil performance, particularly among low-achieving pupils, promotes cyberbullying, and contributes to an increase in teenage anxiety, depression, and suicide," as reasons for passing the restriction

"Frequent interruptions from cell phones have been shown to decrease productivity and increase anxiety and depression. This has contributed to a national mental health crisis with its greatest impact on adolescents," Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics Specialist Marianna Eraklis, MD, said. "Legislation is important for promoting healthy brain development, learning and social emotional development as well as protecting kids from phone [and] screen addiction."

AB 272 states that the governing body of a school district, a county office of education, or a charter school can adopt a policy to limit or prohibit the student use of smartphones while they are on a school site or while under the supervision of an employee. The bill also cites four scenarios during which a school or district cannot forbid cell phone use. These include emergency scenarios, when a teacher or administrator grants permission, when a licensed physician or surgeon deems access to a phone necessary, or when a pupil's individualized education program requires smartphone use.

While the school district has can legally restrict phone usage during school hours or under school jurisdiction as they see fit, students have expressed varying opinions about this authority's relation to their privacy.

"I wouldn't say that the phone policy is a violation of my rights, but I definitely think it's an inconvenience when I want to text my dad or check my calendar," senior Samuel Whipple said.

Amidst the passing of recent California laws encouraging school districts to administer phone policies, the AUHSD implemented a policy for the 2023-2024 fiscal school year that aimed to eliminate technology abuse during class. While the policy required only teacher permitted use of devices, it did not standardize the method of phone limitation, leading enforcement to vary between classrooms.

According to a survey that *Blueprint* conducted in September 2024s, of 25 Certificated and Classified Staff, 30 percent reported they had a policy in place that required the collection of cell phones under the 2023-2024 policy, 25 percent reported they did not have a policy in place that required the collection of cell phones, and 45 percent reported they had a policy in place but it did not require phones to be collected from students.

Administrators observed that, in the 2023-2024 school year, classrooms where teachers consistently collected phones during instructional periods developed strong class culture and high participation.

"I think teachers who had developed systems for implementation of the policy last year saw quite a difference in how students were engaged in class, in terms of being more on task, being more connected with one another, engaging more with the curriculum, and less of that distraction or that pull towards the cell phone just to occupy idle time," Acalanes principal Eric Shawn said.

The effectiveness that teachers saw with restricted phone use encouraged the administration to tighten the policy for the 2024-2025 school year. In revising the guidelines, the district's five schools collaborated to create the AUHSD Board Policy 5131.8. The 2024-2025 district-wide phone policy has similar language to the previous year, the only exceptions being the ban of cell phone use outside of the classroom during instructional periods and a more clearly defined disciplinary course of action for teachers to follow.

"We have been way more intentional with teachers. Last year we introduced it [and] some [teachers] practiced it. This year I think it is also working better because more teachers are doing it, when you're all on the same page it's a lot easier," Associate Principal Andrea Powers said.

While the policy establishes a uniform starting point for instruction and standardizes practices across all schools, each site can make minor adjustments to best meet the needs of their students and tailor their approach to school-specific traits.

"At our school, a teacher could choose a caddy, or a box, or whatever [other container]. We utilized our Student Support Resources to purchase whatever a teacher needed in order to enforce the policy, [while] other schools might have had one uniform system for everybody to use," Shawn said.

Despite only moderate changes, the revamped policy surprised many returning Acalanes students. Although, some seem to already be adapting to the new classroom dynamic.

"At the beginning of the year I was very shocked with the new policy and its severity. However, these past few weeks I have grown accustomed to the change," senior Leila Hamidi said.

So far, the new guidelines seem to yield successful results in policy enforcement levels on the Acalanes campus.

According to the same *Blueprint* survey, 85 percent of teachers reported they routinely collect their students' phones this year, more than double the reported amount under the 2023-2024 policy.

Administrator observations seem to reflect these findings.

"I would say [the policy is] being enforced in probably ninety percent of the classrooms, I think the only reason why I say not 100 is there are some times when ... there's so many different things going on ... that [sometimes] you are going to use [the phones]," Powers said.

In only a month, many teachers have noticed greater student focus.

The same *Blueprint* survey affirms this observation. The survey concludes that 57.9 percent of staff believe the newly implemented phone policy created "extremely positive" outcomes in their classrooms in terms of student participation and engagement, while 31.6 percent believe the policy had a "somewhat positive" impact.

Other teachers feel that detaching from phones in learning environments lead students to develop healthy mobile habits.

"There is a lot more self-control that the students are building up. The ability to separate themselves from their phones is a demonstration of self control," World History and Advanced Placement (AP) Comparative Government teacher Joseph Schottland said. "I think that even when the phones are away in their backpack or away on their person, the fact that they can hear a buzz or feel a buzz distracts them and they're not focused on what they need to be focused on. So I think the fact that we're forcing them to put it in a pocket, not just away, is a good thing."

However, some students notice that because many teachers are less strict when limiting laptop use, unmonitored access to the device causes distractions similar to those of cell phones.

"You can still go on your computer and do the things that you would do on your phone on your computer so I don't think [the classroom environment] changes that much," sophomore Kimberly Zhang said.

Some Acalanes teachers are apprehensive about collecting students' phones in case of extreme on-campus events.

"I think all teachers need to enforce it, but I 1000 percent do not think [phones] should be locked up. I think [students] need access to them in case of an emergency ... If there was a lockdown the kids should be able to have easy and immediate access to phones so they can contact loved ones," surveyed teacher 1 said.

Some parents share similar safety concerns. However, whether or not direct communication between parents and students is necessary during campus emergencies remains a topic of conversation.

"If a kid texts their parent something [and] they misinform [them], then the office is dealing with all of these calls ... So really messages should be coming from the Acalanes Administration rather than getting a message from your kid because it might not be accurate and cause a bigger problem," Anonymous parent said.

Some students notice the phone policy appears to add friction between students and teachers.

"It makes students feel like our teachers have lost trust in us, but I also understand why they have. There has been a lot of cheating involving phones in the last few years, and even during class time it can be tempting to be on your phone instead of paying attention to the lesson," senior Esa Orman said.

AUHSD administration believes this year's approach of eliminating phone-use during class could help strengthen student-teacher relationships.

"I would hope that there would be kind of fertile ground for growing stronger relationships between teachers and students if people are focused on the class and not on distractions that are coming through a phone, but I think

that remains to be seen," Dr. Nickerson said.

Others believe the policy can help build connections between peers and foster community.

"Social interactions are considerably better without the presence of a phone, which personally I think is more important than the academic piece. I think that is the most important thing. [Artificial Intelligence] is going to do all of the multiple choice tests for us, but can you look someone in the eye and have a conversation with them? Not having your phone on you helps a lot with that practice," AP Psychology teacher Nader Jazayeri said.

While the policy aims to help facilitate relationships between students and their school community, it also poses concerns for those entering a new school. According to an article by The *Harvard Gazette*, many students struggle with coming to a school that has removed their main source of communication. Acalanes administration considers the impact that removing cell phones might have on minority students.

"There's enough evidence to show that young people from marginalized communities ... can find a social safety net, and resources, and community, through social media and phones and online, that can keep them balanced and feeling healthy," Shawn said.

As the phone policy continues to evolve, some have raised the question of whether it should continue to expand.

"It'd be interesting to see whether the school, the site, or the district, goes to an even stricter policy which is no phones on campus. That I think is a little bit more of a debatable issue ... I think that there are some arguments on both sides to that, certainly there are very strong advantages to that but I also think that there might be more community backlash," Schottland said.

While the administration continues to discuss the phone policy, some AUHSD principles have expressed interest in expanding the policy to include Yondr Pouches, a secure bag that magnetically locks a mobile device inside until an admin user unlocks it. Ygnacio Valley High, amongst other schools in the Bay Area, have already implemented this measure, requiring students to place their phones in the pouches and carry them until the end of the school day.

"[No AUHSD sites are] using Yondr pouches at this point, some of the principals are interested in exploring that and how that happens. There will be high engagement with the student body and the parents about that, getting opinions and having dialogue and discourse before a decision is made to move that direction," Dr. Nickerson said.

Some teachers believe a policy that balances removing phones during instructional time and allotting students intervals during school to use their phones may be good for the student.

"I do not personally collect phones, but I do have a policy where students are to put their phones away during instructional time. I totally understand why other teachers and classes do, but I find students really appreciate the ability to check quickly at the end of the period or during a brain break. Taking phones away makes me uncomfortable and has been negative in the past at previous schools, but the school-wide policy of having them away during class is super helpful," surveyed teacher 2 said.

Despite varying viewpoints on the extent and implementation of the AUHSD's phone policy, many see value in a learning environment where cell phones have a smaller role.

"School is a place to learn, and despite how I feel about not having my phone, I feel like I learn better without it," Whipple said

While it is still early to gauge the academic impact of AUHSD's revised policy, the district continues to evaluate the right avenue in creating a productive environment for students to learn and develop.

"I think there's a lot to be said about what this space could look like if we didn't have devices as a part of what we do, but there's also arguments that I've heard both within our district and external to our district [that] we are preparing our students for life after high school and you're not going to have the same structures to control your behavior when you graduate high school," Shawn said.

# Dons in the Spotlight

*Three Acalanes students take the stage in the thrilling Lamorinda Idol competition*

By Zinnia Khan, Hannah Geraghty, and Cara Hamilton | DEIB Director, Business Manager, and Staff Writer

The crowd falls silent as the opening notes begin to play. Singer after singer takes the stage and performs for the panel of three judges and an audience of family members, dear friends, and trusted peers. The decisions of the panel, combined with the vote of the audience, will determine who wins.

The finals of Lamorinda Idol, a community singing competition, took place on Aug. 18 at the Orinda Theater with one winner and two overall finalists from Acalanes High School.

Lamorinda Idol is a summer tradition in the Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda communities (Lamorinda) that dates back to the competition's establishment in 2006. The Lamorinda Arts Council's annual competition allows young singers to perform for an audience while improving their art.

"Lamorinda Idol has provided an avenue for young people to pursue their passion for singing and develop their skills," Lamorinda Idol Chairman Stephen Harwood said. "In the process, the participants have made connections with others with a similar interest. Their performances have been a gift to the community."

Nearly every year, students from Acalanes participate in the competition. This year is unique because Acalanes had three finalists: frosh Jamie Chen-Lichman, junior Avery Hemenway, and senior Sadie Poole. Poole won the high school solo category.

"I have been singing since elementary school. I have always loved sharing music with people through performances and the community that comes with singing. The friends that I have made through it have definitely been what has kept me doing it in most recent years. There is so much support that comes from it," Poole said.

Children from kindergarten to high school audition for the competition, with a panel of judges selecting who advances to the next stage.

"There's different age categories, and then within those age categories, you have competitors. There are solo and group competitions and ... if you're good you move on," Chen-Lichman said.

If a singer passes the audition round, they become a finalist and perform at various community venues throughout the summer, such as Moraga Commons Park and the Orinda Fourth of July Parade.

"My favorite is always the Moraga concert, as it is usually at summer's peak. It is an awesome way to hang out with other performers in a low-stress environment and it is so fun to see everyone perform and connect over music," Poole said.

The Lamorinda Idol finals take place in August at the Orinda Theater, where the finalists perform in front of three judges and a live audience. The performers must receive the audience's vote and the judge's vote to win their category. Judges choose to participate in the competition for many reasons.

"I love working with teenagers in particular, and watching their growth and development as artists ... It just really appeals to me that young performers are keeping the arts alive," Lamorinda Idol judge David Pinkham said.

The judges of the singing contest have experience in their field, ranging from vocal coaching to directing high school musicals. Some judges are even former Lamorinda Idol contestants. Judges return year after year to support the competition and provide feedback to young singers.

"We seek judges who have had extensive experience, usually professionally, with music and the arts," Harwood said.

The Lamorinda Idol program uses constructive feedback from the judges to encourage singers to improve their performance and technique.

"After we performed, the judges would give us advice about how to improve our performance. It really helped learning what we needed to work on in order to have better performances in the future," past Lamorinda Idol participant and junior Kayla Medeiros said.

Lamorinda Idol judges attribute technique, emotion, and storytelling to a well-rounded performance.

"For me, what makes a successful performance is first of all, confidence and stage presence, which is not something you can really teach someone. That feeling that from the moment that they're being introduced there's just a level of confidence ... that leads to success, whether the performance is exemplary or not," Pinkham said.

Lamorinda Idol's competitors attend schools across the Lamorinda community. The program presents an environment where individuals can build community and connect with like-minded artists by erasing geographical boundaries.

"Lamorinda Idol brings kids who would never know each other otherwise together. Someone who went to Orinda Intermediate School and Miramonte can become best friends with someone from Stanley and Acalanes," Lamorinda Idol finalist and Campolindo High School frosh Micah Cedars said.

Finalists appreciate bonding with students across districts over their shared love for singing.

"Lamorinda Idol is something that gives us the opportunity to connect kids all across Lamorinda, getting to watch and support each other while doing the thing we all love most," Medeiros said.

This year's finalists will perform at the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival on Sept. 21 and 22, giving the group a final opportunity to showcase their talent as Lamorinda Idol finalists until next year.

"[Lamorinda Idol] gives our community a view of how the youth in our community can contribute, not just from the arts but as people. It just gives you hope," Pinkham said.

*Blueprint* Photo/Zinnia Khan
Micah Cedars and Jamie Chen-Lichman perform their duet for Lamorinda Idol judges.

# LA MODE: Fashion Column

## Embracing Summer's Relaxed Denim Trend

*Aya O'Neal, Olivia Silverstein, and Will Miller | Online Content Manager and Staff Writers*
*Spread by Aya O'Neal | Online Content Manager*

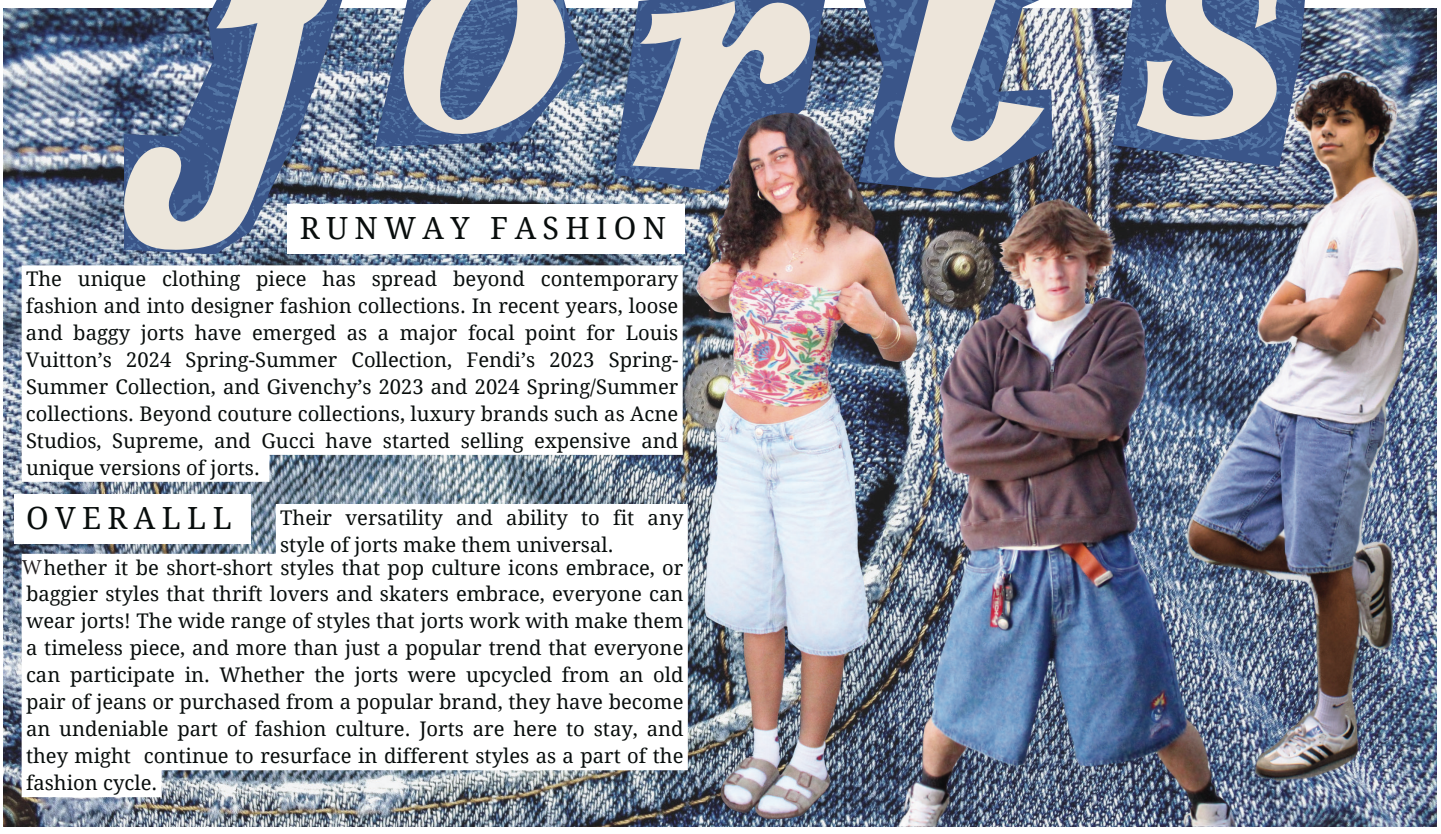
Over the summer, the fashion enthusiasts at Acalanes have embraced a new essential for their wardrobes— blue denim, knee-length JORTS! The term "jorts" is derived from the words "jeans" and "shorts" and refers to baggier styles of jeans cropped to or above the knee. Jorts first started making an appearance on the sidewalks of Lafayette in the summer of 2024, and now, with back-to-school season and sunny days ahead, one can expect a hallway forecast filled with this jean-short trend.

# jorts

## HISTORY

Jeans date back to 1873, and their popularity was rooted in their practicality. Levi Strauss & Co. marketed jeans as durable workwear during the Gold Rush, contributing to its notable popularity among those seeking protective apparel. Because exposed skin presented dangers in the demanding working environments where jeans were predominantly worn, it took shifting societal and fashion norms for jorts to emerge as a viable and popular style choice years later.

In the 1960s, the novel concept of cutting jeans into shorts surfaced, as fashion trends shifted towards more relaxed and informal styles. This movement was part of a broader counter-culture shift, which embraced personal expression and comfort over practicality. In the 1970s, media and pop culture introduced super-short jean shorts as "Daisy Dukes," a symbol of youth and rebellious fashion that was common among youth. The 1980s saw jorts evolve to include acid wash versions and athletic crossovers. The athleisure movement inspired notable figures, including professional tennis player Andre Agassi, to wear jorts at the US Open, blending athleticism with everyday style. The 1990s brought a major shift with hip-hop's rise in popularity, which introduced baggier jorts with a grungy, do-it-yourself-focused aesthetic. Celebrities such as Nelly, Lil Jon, and John Cena popularized these oversized styles, contributing to their widespread appeal and cementing their place in street fashion. The 2000s introduced a new and bolder approach to jorts, with colorful and embellished styles. This era saw a resurgence of shorter and more micro styles, with celebrities like Rihanna sporting playful, low-rise designs. Today, baggy jorts are making a notable comeback. This revival draws from trends like Bloke Core, a social media trend where people pair baggy jorts with sporty elements like soccer kits, which originated as a way for fans to show support for their preferred team leading up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Additionally, the Y2K fashion revival and older-brother core aesthetics are influencing the current jort styles, combining nostalgic 90s styles and modern elements.



## RUNWAY FASHION

The unique clothing piece has spread beyond contemporary fashion and into designer fashion collections. In recent years, loose and baggy jorts have emerged as a major focal point for Louis Vuitton's 2024 Spring-Summer Collection, Fendi's 2023 Spring-Summer Collection, and Givenchy's 2023 and 2024 Spring/Summer collections. Beyond couture collections, luxury brands such as Acne Studios, Supreme, and Gucci have started selling expensive and unique versions of jorts.

## OVERALLL

Their versatility and ability to fit any style of jorts make them universal. Whether it be short-short styles that pop culture icons embrace, or baggier styles that thrift lovers and skaters embrace, everyone can wear jorts! The wide range of styles that jorts work with make them a timeless piece, and more than just a popular trend that everyone can participate in. Whether the jorts were upcycled from an old pair of jeans or purchased from a popular brand, they have become an undeniable part of fashion culture. Jorts are here to stay, and they might continue to resurface in different styles as a part of the fashion cycle.

# Book Nook

*Examining differences between book to screen adaptations*

***The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown**
Tatum McElhattan | Print Arts Editor
Spread by Maya Stafford | Print Arts Editor

*"Every man in the boat had absolute confidence in every one of his mates ... Why they won cannot be attributed to individuals, not even to stroke Dun Hume. Heartfelt cooperation all spring was responsible for the victory."*

Daniel James Brown's novel, *The Boys in the Boat*, tells the true story of a young American, eight-oar rowing team from the University of Washington intending to secure a gold medal in the 1963 Olympics. The main character, Joe Rantz, is a young man with no family or prospects aspiring to find his place in the world through rowing. Brown draws from the real-life journals of the original rowing team, telling the thrilling and hopeful story of how a college crew team made their way to the Berlin Olympics, rowing against Hitler's German team.

George Clooney produced and directed "The Boys in the Boat" (2023) film, which tells a very similar story though it alters some details of the plot to enhance the action. It does not delve as deeply into Joe's complicated family life as the book does at the beginning. Specifically, it fails to include Rantz's father abandoning him at the age of fifteen, but the film still makes it clear that he lacks close family and friends to support him. The film also focuses more on the coach, Al Ulbrickson, and his struggles with selecting team members and the anxieties of Olympic readiness.

Overall, the book is a much slower and more historically accurate piece that people gravitating toward historical dramas will enjoy reading. The movie is heavily sports-focused and features thrilling action that will likely attract a different audience. Despite their differences, most will enjoy the compelling narrative and historical depth of both.

***A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* by Holly Jackson**
Samantha Swift | Staff Writer

*"They were each other's crutch to lean on when life got too much to carry alone."*

In Holly Jackson's mystery novel, A Good Girl's Guide to Murder, Pip Fitz-Amobi is a senior in high school, working on a capstone graduation project. Pip decides to center her project on Andie Bell, whom Sal Singh, her boyfriend, presumably murders and later committs suicide. With no confirmed murderer, Pip takes it upon herself to unravel the mystery on her own, with the help of Sal's brother, Ravi. She digs deep and begins to see the inconsistencies of this so-called, "straightforward" case. As Pip gets closer to the truth, she receives threats commanding her to stop her investigation, which only encourage her.

Dolly Wells and Tom Vaughan directed the Netflix series adaptation of the book trilogy, which premiered in July 2024. With only six episodes, fans hope the producers will renew the show for a second season, but confirmation is still pending. Jackson introduces the themes of identity and how one's reputation influences the perceptions of others.

While the film adaptation explored similar themes, there were some differences. The show takes place in the English countryside, whereas the book is set in Connecticut. The biggest difference in the show is the series' deeper exploration of Pip's motivation for getting involved in the case, which the book did not include. Overall, the adaptation stays very true to the book and is enjoyable to watch, with or without having read the novel beforehand.

***Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan**
Grace Wolpert | Print Arts Copy Editor and Business Team Member

*"You shall go west, and face the god who has turned. You shall find what was stolen, and see it safely returned."*

In Rick Riordan's fantasy novel, *The Lightning Thief*, 12-year-old Percy Jackson discovers he is the son of a Greek god.

With this newfound knowledge, he must immerse himself in a mythical world he never knew existed. Through hardship and loss, he finds himself at Camp Halfblood, a hotspot for half-human, half-god teens. Despite finally surrounding himself with people who understand what it is like to see the world differently, he discovers that his Greek god blood makes him the most unique of all at Camp Half-blood.

The Greek god, Ares, frames Jackson for stealing Zeus' lightning bolt because of his abnormal power. As Jackson and his newfound friends embark on a journey to retrieve the stolen bolt and return it to its rightful owner, Jackson learns more about himself and the world he now lives in.

This engaging plot and its complex characters are represented in the eight-episode-long TV series, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, in 2023. Produced by John Catron and Disney, this film includes advanced CGI when depicting the fictional characters and scenery. Walker Scobell played Jackson, Leah Jeffries played Annabeth Chase, and Aryan Simhadri played Grover Underwood, the three bringing a whole new life to the fictional characters. Their caring and understanding demeanor as a trio is carried out very well in the show.

Overall, the screen adaptation caught many of the details that were in the book. However, with any book-to-film adaptation, the scenes did not capture all events and minute features. Some notable differences include Jackson's personality. In the books, his jokes typically have more sass, whereas in the film his jokes are rather clever and less direct.

Additionally, the group dynamic between Jackson and his friends is noticeably different as the film exhibits a power struggle between the three which does not occur in the book. Despite these differences, the changes in the series do not modify the central narrative, and Catron's rendition is a very enjoyable, lighthearted series.

# Ruebner's Records

## Three Indie Album Recommendations

Cole Ruebner | Contributing Writer

Spread by Justin Rosenblatt | Senior Graphics Editor

***Is This It* - The Strokes**

*Is This It* is an incredibly colorful album. From the striking yellow and blue cover to the bright and distinctive guitar work to the distorted, crackly vocals, this album is full of life from start to finish.

Contrasting with its contemporaries at the time, *Is This It* chose a stripped-back, dry approach, offering a far more vibrant texture. The band lets the guitars do most of the talking while the drums hang in the back, offering rhythm without bringing too much attention to themselves. The titular introduction track outlines the feel for much of the album moving on: colorful arpeggios and repeating reverb-soaked riffs; bouncy bass and Julian Casablancas's signature distorted vocals. It does not have many layers, but that is part of its charm.

One of my favorite parts of this album is Casablancas's delivery. He is not necessarily the best singer, but the way he amplifies his voice adds so much texture to every song he is on. When he chooses a softer approach, the distortion adds another layer of color and intrigue, but when he chooses to go all out, it makes his voice sound raw, passionate, and unhinged. A good example of this contrast is the song "Alone, Together," one of my personal favorites on the album. Casablancas sings soft, stretched-out vocal passages interspersed between plucky guitar riffs, and his voice accentuates the switch between single-string picking and chord strumming. However, a few minutes into the track the whole song shifts as the guitars pick up, and Casablancas full-on screams into the microphone. The change-up is gratifying and showcases versatility in the band's deceptively simple formula.

This album, as well as the Strokes' unique style in general, has been extremely impactful in the indie rock scene, inspiring artists like the Arctic Monkeys, LCD Soundsystem, and Vampire Weekend to name a few. Overall, *Is This It* is a catchy, creative, and wildly influential indie rock album perfect for anybody looking to dip their toes into the genre.

***Ants From Up There* - Black Country New Road**

Directly contrasting with the upbeat energy of *Is This It*, *Ants From Up There* is pure, raw emotion. I tend to make lofty statements in my writing about songs that I enjoy, saying something is "the best" a bit too often. But, in this case, if you listen to a song like "Concorde" and feel nothing, your headphones are broken. This album delivers song after song of indie folk perfection, with fantastic progressions that make every track feel like a little journey of its own.

"Concorde," as I mentioned before, conveys pure emotion. It begins soft and tender, with echoey strings and bass framed by a marching drum beat, while former lead singer Isaac Wood delivers beautiful, esoteric lyrics about the loss of a loved one. The song slowly progresses into an incredible crescendo with Wood wailing deeply vivid lyrics over a wall of strings and guitars. It is hard to find a fault in the song's 6-minute runtime.

While the instrumentation throughout the album is nothing short of incredible, what ties *Ants From Up There* together are Wood's vocal performances. The singer has always been open about his struggles with mental health, and his pain really comes through in the album. Even if the lyrics are not clear, the emotion in Isaac Wood's voice is more than enough to ensure every song has a lasting impact.

I cannot talk about this album without talking about the deeply moving "The Place Where He Inserted the Blade." Clocking in at a bit over seven minutes in length, this song feels like it goes by in merely two. It is a rollercoaster of emotional highs and lows, that deserves a celebration as a bona fide masterpiece.

So many songs on this album give me genuine chills, so much so that it is honestly hard to describe. To anybody looking for heart-wrenching, dense, creative folk odysseys, few albums compare to *Ants From Up There*.

***The Velvet Underground and Nico* - The Velvet Underground**

Released in 1967, *The Velvet Underground and Nico* was extremely ahead of its time. So many aspects of it are unapologetically personal, from its iconic Andy Warhol-designed album cover to its daring meditations on drug abuse and sexuality. This album was experimental before it was cool.

One of my favorite parts of this album is how much each song contrasts from one another. It features absolutely beautiful ballads sung by Nico like "Femme Fatale" and "All Tomorrow's Parties," while on other songs the tone completely shifts as Lou Reed sing-talks over jittery rock cuts like "I'm Waiting For My Man," and "There She Goes Again." However, the same crackly and vintage feel strings together every song on the album, providing warmth to even the most abrasive tracks.

Yet another reason this album cements itself in indie and alternative rock history is the experimentation that Reed, Nico, and the rest of the band pioneered. "Heroin" is a great example of this. The song starts relatively normal albeit gut-wrenchingly sad and far ahead of its time lyrically. Lou Reed croons about his struggle with drug usage over disjointed guitar strums. Yet, as the song progresses, a sharp droning string instrument gradually builds and becomes louder and louder until the harsh noise completely drowns the rest of the song out. It is by no means easy listening, but I like to understand it as an auditory representation of Reed's relationship with drug addiction. It feels more like a daring piece of art than a song - a story told by the music as well as the lyrics.

*The Velvet Underground and Nico* is dirty. The drums are off-kilter, the guitar mixing is all over the place, and it is purposefully unlistenable at certain points. Somehow all of these qualities work together to build something unlike anything I have ever heard before in the best way possible. Again, *The Velvet Underground and Nico* genuinely feels more like an art exhibit at a museum than an album - a product of its time that no one could ever replicate. Projects like The *Velvet Underground and Nico* get me excited to talk about music, and I cannot recommend this experience enough.

# Soundtracks of the Summer

## *Review of summer's most popular albums*

Hanna Wiśniewska, Molly Jones, Sela Sarbiewski, and Sydney Scovic | Social Media Manager, Photo Story Editor, and Staff Writers

Graphics by Audrey Martin | Head Photographer

Summer album releases brought a diverse mix of sounds, ranging from upbeat pop to slower alternative music. The new releases provide listeners with a variety of songs that embody summertime.

***BRAT***

Charli XCX's album *BRAT* released on June 7 and is still rapidly gaining popularity on social media. The 15 songs range in genre from hyperpop to dance-pop, giving the album an upbeat vibe. The opening and most popular song, "360," has almost 180 million plays according to Spotify, and is a strong and confident start to the album.

Charli XCX debuted in 2013 with "True Romance" and continued to rise in popularity in 2014 with the release of her single, "Boom Clap," which reached nearly 500 million plays. Her album, *Sucker*, also gained some popularity with the tracks "Break the Rules" and "Famous". Although most of Charli XCX's songs have under 50 million plays, *BRAT* brought more attention to the British singer, providing an opportunity for future global success. The collaboration with Billie Eilish on the song "Guess" was an unexpected, yet exciting moment for fans of both artists.

The album's release date complimented the start of summer. The tracks have a theme of self expression and unapologetic confidence, which aligns with the title of the album. Charli XCX's exploration with hyper-pop through *BRAT* demonstrates her willingness to challenge mainstream pop and explore a new genre. In the context of Charli XCX's past, *BRAT* is a step deeper into hyper-pop and an album representing her self exploration in a chaotic and unfiltered manner.

***The Great American Bar Scene***

Zach Bryan's new country album, *The Great American Bar Scene*, released on July 4. The album has 17 songs and one poem. His following progresses with around 32.3 million monthly listeners on Spotify.

Bryan's new album adds a new perspective to country music through collaborations with prominent artists such as John Mayer, Bruce Springsteen, and John Moreland. His most popular songs on the album are, "Pink Skies," and "Sandpaper (feat. Bruce Springsteen)."

His lead single on the album, "Pink Skies," resonates with fans due to its emotional depth and heartfelt themes. The song is about adult children returning home for a funeral and tributes to the passage of time and remembrance.

Bryan's collaboration with Bruce Springsteen, "Sandpaper," garners nostalgic feelings toward one of Springsteen's earlier songs "I'm on Fire, " which has similar rhythms. The song dives into the theme of resilience and roughness within relationships and life.

Another highlight of Bryan's album is his opening track, "Lucky Enough." The song is about appreciating life's blessings despite its challenges. "Lucky Enough" is an inspiring way to start *The Great American Bar Scene* by introducing a message of gratitude and thankfulness.

Ultimately, Bryan's new album uses the essence of an American bar scene as a symbol of community. His songwriting focuses on the raw and imperfect aspects of life, connecting with his fanbase on a more personal level. Bryan proceeds to move the nation with his impactful lyrics and anecdotal messages, staying true to himself and his roots.

***X's:***

Cigarettes After Sex's newest album, *X's*, was released on July 12 and has quickly reached over 120 million streams. Many people agree to label these ten songs as dream-pop because they have slow tempos with unique lyrics that are almost hypnotic. The leading songs with the most Spotify plays, *X's*, and "Tejano Blue," are a soft and sweet start to the album, though some listeners

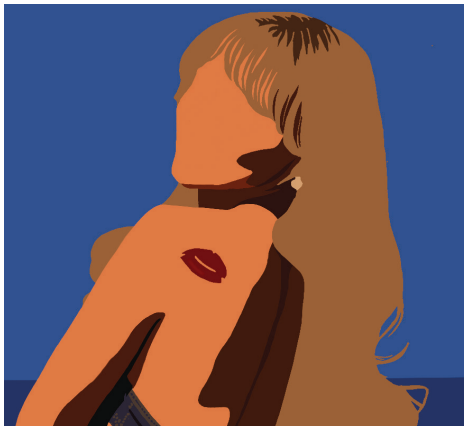
prefer the lesser-known songs.

Greg Gonzalez, their lead vocalist, claimed he started Cigarettes After Sex "by accident" in a random stairwell at the University of Texas in 2008. Joined by Randall Miller and Jacob Tomsky, the three released their first big hit, "Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby," in 2012.

According to Gonzalez, he was inspired to write "X's" at the brutal end of a four-year-long relationship he was in. He composed the album such that the opening tracks express the dreamy, honeymoon phase at the beginning of his relationship, while the ending songs encompass the grief of his break-up.

*X's* has quickly become very popular with the younger generation through social media music platforms, like TikTok, as have their previous albums.

Cigarettes After Sex's new album provides a unique style of music for listeners to unwind during the summer.



***Short n' Sweet:***

Sabrina Carpenter's latest album, *Short n' Sweet*, was released on August 23 and features 12 songs from many genres. The 12 songs have an overarching theme of pop, with sounds of country, bluegrass, and disco. The album includes popular pre-released singles like "Espresso," which has over one billion plays on Spotify, and "Please Please Please," which has nearly 700 million plays, and other hidden gems.

The pop-coded songs on this album are the standouts, but other parts of Carpenter's identity come out in this album as she introduces different sounds. This release proves to be a great hit with catchy songs that have already done very well since its release in August.

Only having 12 tracks is truly a reference to how Carpenter herself is indeed short and sweet, but the title also symbolizes how she is fed up with how past relationships have treated her. Several tracks on the album could be considered break-up songs, however, in most of the songs, Carpenter portrays a bitter attitude and takes a more "over-it" tone through the songs. Blatant honesty fills the album, and Carpenter's true feelings appear to come out along with loads of clever lyrics and innuendos.

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# Artist of the Issue

*An insight into the artistic skill and technique of student photographer Senior Olivia DeBoy*

Melina Galacatos and Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Online Editor and Staff Writer
Photos by Olivia Deboy

At Acalanes, Olivia DeBoy is known for photographing athletes. Her photos capture the thrill of games, providing students with action shots to treasure.

DeBoy photographs animals and sports, and her photos reach the Acalanes student body and beyond.

"Photography is a way that you can serve your school but have fun while doing so ... It gives you a purpose to reach out and connect with others and share their stories," Photography and Videography teacher Eric Morford said.

DeBoy's interest in photography began when she signed up for a photography class at Acalanes in her sophomore year, and her passion for this art form grew from there. Her early work in photography included subjects like animals and portraits, but she soon developed a passion for sports photography after attending a football game to take pictures.

"I ended up loving it. I've photographed every single [football] game since then," DeBoy said.

DeBoy extended her portfolio to basketball and softball games during her junior year. She captures athletes while they play, giving them a memento of their hard work. She often sends her photos to athletes and uses them to design promotional posts for teams to build student spirit and support for the athletes.

"It's super cool that Olivia came to take photos of our team because softball isn't really as popular or as well known as other sports at Acalanes. Since athletes devote so much time to their sports, it's great that they get to look back at moments during games and be appreciated for their efforts and abilities," varsity softball player and senior Emme Young said.

Community members working alongside DeBoy note that her motivation to practice and improve photography makes her stand out as a student and photographer.

"Olivia's pursuit of wanting to practice this medium as much as possible is what separates any good from great student, person, athlete, artist, or writer," Morford said.

Since she discovered her interest in sports photography, DeBoy's technique has improved vastly in the past two years through hours of practice. She has developed a detailed understanding of what makes an interesting photo and graphic design skills she can use to edit her pictures before distributing them.

"She'd take her photos, and then she would remove the background, put them in photoshop, and then implement words and different textures that can be made into a promotional graphic for a sports team, for an upcoming game, or a recap of a game score," Morford said.

DeBoy is eager to continue learning about and practicing photography during her senior year at Acalanes and well into her future.

"I really want to [photograph] the [Campolindo versus Acalanes] football game ... I want to work for the National Football League one day, I want to be a photographer specifically for the 49ers," Deboy said

DeBoy's hard work and dedication prepare her to continue improving her work with athletes at Acalanes and begin an exciting career in sports photography after high school.

"Her work will inspire others this year. People will see the photos she takes and will love that. [It is] something that I know for a fact she will do professionally in the future. This year is all about preparing her for her future career in photography, wherever that may land her," Morford said.

**Blueprint *acknowledges that Olivia DeBoy has contributed photos to* Blueprint *in previous issues***

# Quote of the Issue

*"Somewhere, there's a place where I find who I'm gonna be. Somewhere, that's just waiting to be found" - La La Land*

Avery Robb | Print Editor-In-Chief

*Blueprint* Graphic/Sof Cerruti

Everyone is on a journey to find their "somewhere." It is in the quiet moments of reflection as we dream about the future or the late-night conversations in a random parking lot, piecing together a reality of hopes.

I often go back and forth about where my "somewhere" will be. Will I move off to a tropical location and live on a farm? Or maybe open a restaurant in uptown New York? As I try to take in all these different realities it is like my vision is slashed, impaired by a cloud of smoke, preventing me from looking past my current reality to see where my "somewhere" will be.

My blurred vision stops me from looking too far into the future, but by slowing down I am grounded in the present with the ever-pressing question of post-graduation plans. I am engulfed in the whirlwind that is college decisions and the more I look into these supposed top schools, with the best of the best programs, the more I realize how little the destination matters. Sure, specific schools offer certain benefits, but at the end of the day no matter where I am there will always be opportunities to uncover the ever-evolving place of "somewhere."

As I have struggled with making these important life decisions, I have discovered that somewhere is not a concrete place but a series of moments, experiences, and realizations that shape us. It is found in the pursuit of our dreams, in the relationships we build, and in the courage we show as we navigate the unknown. The future is fluid, molded by the paths we choose and the actions we make. There is no fixed endpoint; everyone's path is shifting and changing in relation to how we live in the present day.

Our paths are active choices. I used to think that fate would send me where I needed to go, and that things happened for a reason. And while I still do believe certain things are meant to happen while other things are not, now I think the idea of fate is more intentional. We will never be able to reach what fate has intended for us if we passively sit by and expect life to come to us. Fate is determined by the actions we choose to take and the people we choose to experience life with. How we develop along our journeys is as much a part of fate as what we will do in the future.

At the end of the day, finding our "somewhere" is about embracing the uncertainty of life and the endless possibilities that come with it. We may not know exactly where we are headed, but the search itself is what defines us. Each step forward, no matter how uncertain, is a step closer to becoming who we are meant to be. And that place, that "somewhere," is always waiting, just beyond the horizon, waiting to be found.

# Recipe of the Issue

## *Smoked Barbecue Ribs*

Jake Colaco and Hank Bauer | Head Section Editor and Senior Photographer

Nothing says summer like a plate of tender, smoked Barbecue (BBQ) ribs. These ribs are seasoned with a flavorful rub and finished with a savory BBQ sauce, creating a delightful eating experience. Whether you are hosting a backyard barbecue or simply enjoying a meal with loved ones, these ribs will steal the show. Easy to prepare and packed with flavor, they embody the true essence of summer dining. So gather your friends and family, fire up the grill, and get ready to enjoy some savory ribs.

*Blueprint* Graphic/Jake Colaco

**Ingredients:**

2 racks of pork ribs
1 cup BBQ sauce
1 tablespoon paprika
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon black pepper

**Directions:**

1. Preheat the grill to medium heat.
2. In a small bowl, mix paprika, brown sugar, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and black pepper. Thoroughly rub the mixture over the ribs.
3. Place the ribs on the grill and cook for 90-120 minutes, flipping occasionally, until they are tender.
4. During the last 15 minutes of grilling, brush the ribs with BBQ sauce.
5. Take the ribs off the grill and let them sit for 5 minutes before serving.

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# Code and Carbon: Examining The Environmental Impact of AI

## *Examining the Environmental Consequences of Artificial Intelligence*

Neve Murphy | Print Opinion Editor

*Blueprint* Graphic/Audrey Martin

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral aspect of our society: Waymo self-driving cars are taking over the streets of San Francisco or Meta AI dominating search activity across social media platforms. AI has even entered the Acalanes community as history teachers use the website Class Companion, equipped with AI grading, and students utilize virtual assistants for their research.

Behind the actions of AI are data centers, responsible for powering and computing AI programs. Data centers are the mastermind behind the internet. Everything that we upload to the internet, that includes posting images on social media and sending text messages, is stored in these data centers and requires electricity to do so.

AI poses the burden of not only storing data, but analyzing it to produce results or complete tasks. When training an AI system, the system must first export and store information, requiring the system to run non-stop. Depending on the complexity of the system, this can take anywhere between a few minutes and multiple months. Developers then train AI systems using various forms of learning, teaching virtual assistants to follow patterns and make connections or learn through the reinforcement of a developer.

The process of training AI systems is not the only factor contributing to its drain on energy sources. Typical computing systems are only responsible for storing and retrieving information, while AI has the added step of analyzing this information to produce new information. This leads to AI virtual assistants like Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer (ChatGPT) using seven to ten times as much energy as search engines like Google, according to the University of Pennsylvania.

The responsibilities of data centers pose a massive drain on energy sources. According to an article from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in the U.S. alone, data centers demand 15 gigawatts of energy annually. For reference, one gigawatt is equal to the energy output of 1.887 million solar panels. The AI industry is growing rapidly, and the International Energy Agency projects that by 2026, global data centers will double the use of electricity from 2022 to accommodate AI expansion.

Despite its environmental threats, some sectors of AI support environmental sustainability such as AI technology in agriculture. According to MIT, AI sys-

tems can calculate the precise amount of fertilizer, water, and pesticide crops needed to reduce waste. AI automations can also make farming 20 to 40 percent more efficient. However, the environmental consequences of training and operating these systems undermine these advantages.

Powering data centers to support AI leads to excessive emission of greenhouse gasses. According to Plan Be Eco, a carbon footprint reporting system, the programming of Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3), a large language model, produced 502 tons of carbon dioxide emissions. That is equivalent to the annual emissions of 112 gas powered cars.

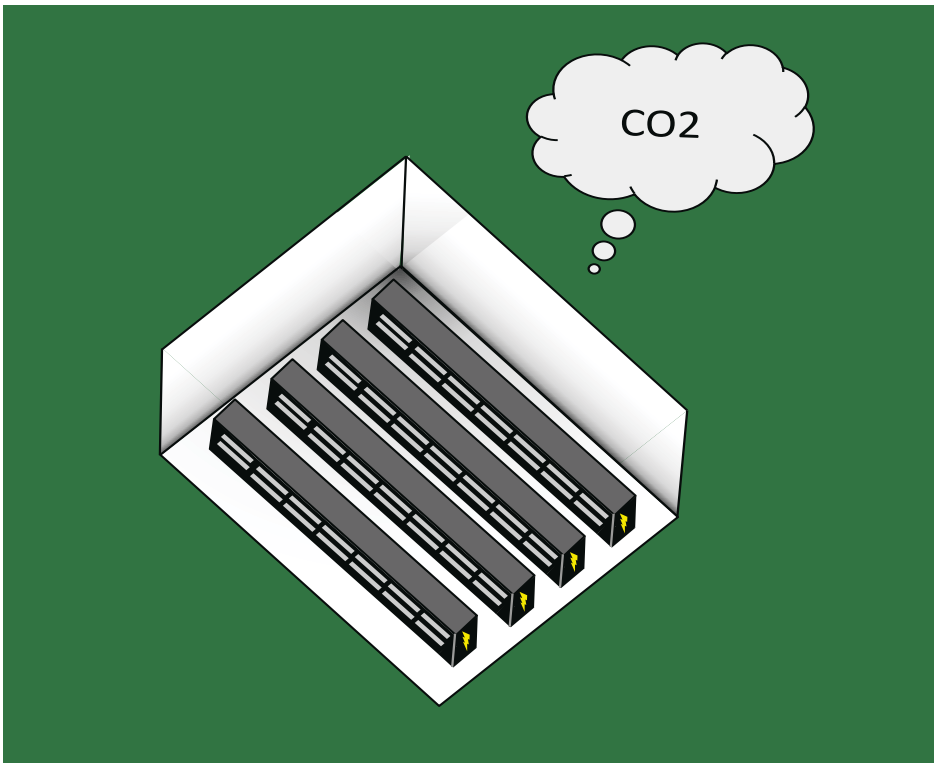
Carbon emissions do not cease when a program completes its training. ChatGPT produces around seven tons of emissions per month. These are only two large language models in operation. According to the AI agents platform Springs, as of July 2024, there are 57,933 AI companies in operation.

AI startups are continuing to pop up across the world. According to Harvard Business Review, the global energy demand for powering AI will increase ten times by 2026 and surpass the annual electricity consumption of a small country such as Belgium.

The projected growth of AI and thus increase in greenhouse gas emissions stresses the pertinence of companies cutting back on emissions. In order to reduce the amount of environmental damage that AI programs cause, the government should regulate the amount of carbon emissions AI companies can produce.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets regulations regarding fuel emissions, aiming to slow climate change. For example, manufacturers must meet EPA fuel efficiency standards in order to sell their vehicles in the U.S. This ensures that these companies do not ignore their environmental impact for cheaper production. The EPA should apply and enforce the same regulations to AI, detailing the amount of annual carbon emissions AI companies can produce. This would force these companies to make a choice: cut back or go green.

Regulations would encourage AI companies to begin to convert data centers to renewable energy sources such as solar or wind power as opposed to burning fossil fuels which drains a nonrenewable source and emits significantly more carbon dioxide.




*Blueprint* Graphic/Neve Murpy

Unfortunately, due to the current size of the AI industry, clean energy sources alone could not produce enough electricity to power all AI programs. According to MIT, clean energy provider Georgia Power has estimated that their power plants will have to accommodate an additional 6.6 gigawatts of power by 2030 due to the expansion of AI. Even if Georgia Power developed the largest solar plant in the world alongside three nuclear reactors, they would not be able to produce this much power.

Due to the logistic challenges of converting AI to renewable sources, companies will eventually have to cut back on AI use in order to meet emission ceilings. Companies will have to prioritize sectors that benefit the economy and society, such as the automatization of medical and agricultural processes, to stay within emission restrictions.

Many people predict that the expansion of AI will be the future of the economy, and regulating emissions will interfere with AI-driven economic growth. However, setting a cap on carbon emissions opens the door for more investment in green energy. These new investments have the potential to offset the revenue decline associated with the expected reduction in growth these regulations would cause.

Some AI companies have already committed to going green. Waymo, a company that established self-operated taxis to transport passengers, has taken off in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Phoenix Ariz., with plans to expand to Houston, Texas. These cars have the ability to calculate the most fuel efficient and precise routes to locations, which, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, will reduce fuel emissions by 50 percent by 2050. Additionally, these cars are fully electric and charged using renewable sources.

The government has applied restrictions to AI in the past such as the California AI Regulation bill that Gov. Gavin Newsom passed on Aug. 30, 2024. This bill declares that large AI companies must improve the cybersecurity of their systems. The same concern should be applied to the environmental damages of AI as the security threats.

The future of the tech sector in the U.S. economy may come at the cost of our planet's future. As AI startups pop up across the globe, automating traditionally human operated systems and revolutionizing our society, greenhouse gasses collect and temperatures rise. We must force these companies to see that an automated future can not come at the expense of our planet.

# Electrifying the Future: The Potential of Electric Bikes

*Examining the transformative potential of electric bikes*

Jenna Kessler | Business Manager

When I walk around downtown Lafayette, electric bikes (e-bikes) are a common sight. I see the community use them for a multitude of purposes: parents carrying their children to and from school, middle schoolers riding with their friends, shoppers carrying purchases in the rear basket, and senior citizens exercising while enjoying the outdoors.

An e-bike is a bicycle that has operable pedals and an electric motor of less than 750 watts. Given that the speed potential of e-bikes varies greatly, through Assembly Bill (AB) 1096, the state of California further defines e-bikes into three classes and requires manufacturers to clearly label each e-bike's class, indicating which rules need to be followed.

According to AB 1096, a class one e-bike has an electric motor that provides assistance only while pedaling (pedal-assist) and stops providing assistance when the bicycle travels 20 miles per hour (mph). The bill further defines a class two e-bike as a throttle-assisted bicycle that is not able to provide assistance over 20 mph. The class three e-bike has pedal-assist up to 28 mph and requires the rider to be over 16, wear a helmet, have a speedometer, and not transport other passengers.

AB 1096 further specifies where each class of e-bike can legally ride. The law allows class one and two e-bikes to ride on bike paths, bike lanes, bike routes, and protected bike lanes, while class three e-bikes can only ride in bike lanes and bike routes.

Despite this regulation, recent biker behavior seems to fall short of safety standards. While e-bikes undeniably offer a sustainable and accessible way to commute, the government needs to implement more safety regulations to maximize their environmental and social benefits.

The e-bike's clean energy design supports environmental sustainability by reducing gas-powered vehicles on the roads, subsequently lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

According to the California Bicycle Coalition, e-bikes are ten to 30 times more effective in fighting climate change than electric cars. In addition, if an e-bike is charged with California's renewable energy mix, an e-bike generates 40 to 140 times fewer pounds of greenhouse gasses than a 30 miles per gallon gas car.

Maintenance and insurance could also make e-bikes a more affordable alternative to owning a car and, depending on the local system, using public transit.

By adopting this cleaner and cost-effective form of transport, individuals can join in addressing some of the world's most pressing environmental and economic challenges.

Besides being sustainable and economically viable, e-bikes offer valuable opportunities to get outside and exercise, despite what many people might think. According to Science Direct, e-bikes require vigorous activity while going uphill and moderate physical activity on level ground. Their electric pedalist assists also make cycling more accessible to people with limited ability.

While e-bikes offer many environmental and financial advantages, they also pose various safety risks.

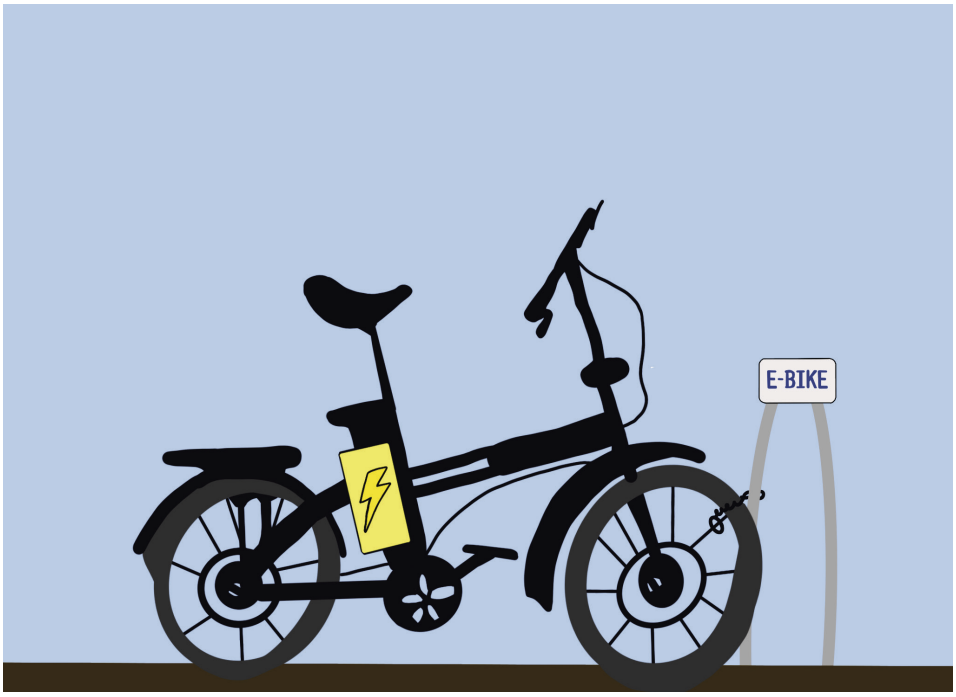
According to a University of California San Francisco (UCSF) study, national e-bike injuries have doubled every year from 2017 to 2022. The study also found that in 2022 more than 23,000 e-bike riders were injured.

Many dangers linked to e-bikes arise from people riding e-bikes recklessly in streets. This danger increases exponentially when younger children and other people who are unfamiliar with traffic laws ride in the street.

Recently, while walking in downtown Lafayette, I witnessed two young

*Continued on 37*

*Blueprint* Graphic/Hank Bauer



# How Real is Reality Television?

*Exploring the fabrications of reality TV and how they impact teenagers*

Maya Stafford | Print Arts Editor

*Blueprint* Graphic/Sof Cerutti

As the world turns to online entertainment more and more, reality TV's popularity is on the rise. Over the summer of 2024, the reality TV show "Love Island" became a sensation on social media, attracting many younger viewers. "Love Island" features a group of people in their 20s trying to find love on a dating show, all while sparking drama and breaking hearts. A *Rolling Stone* poll found that 66 percent of teenagers watch reality TV, and 43 percent of overall viewers are teens. As this show took over social media platforms, dominating my feed, I found myself wondering, how did this show take over my generation?

In order to star on a reality TV show, all contestants must sign contracts, agreeing to certain conditions while filming. In these contracts, participants preemptively agree to fulfill all of the requests of producing, giving producers permission to creatively interpret their dialogue and interactions in a way that creates the most drama and intrigue. Additionally, participants sign their consent for producers to edit, delete, or tamper with any of the footage that is released. Finally, the biggest part of this agreement is that contestants must acknowledge that their experiences on the show may result in mental or physical illness, as well as ridicule from the public.

These controversial contracts do not stop millions of teens from tuning in every day. In fact, viewers are often oblivious as to what goes on behind the scenes of reality shows and instead get sucked into a false reality.

Teenagers who watch reality TV often find this false reality enamoring, changing their behavior and views about their self image. In order to prevent teens from experiencing these consequences, producers should set age limits for reality TV, and teens should learn more about the contrived nature of these series before tuning in.

Producers design reality TV to receive the best feedback from the public. The initial contract, allowing the staging, editing, or deletion of scenes, enables this phenomenon. TV producer Melissa Freeman Fuller revealed that producers often feed lines to cast members. This means that the dramatic dialogue that hooks viewers in, is often staged.

Despite reality TV's fabrications, many people fall into the trap of believing that reality TV is truly a reality. The Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI) conducted a survey where the researchers analyzed how reality TV affects teenagers and their thoughts on the matter. Out of 1,100 young girls across the country, 75 percent of them said that they believed reality TV was completely real, with only 25 percent understanding its fabrication.

Teenagers have a tendency to compare themselves to what they see around them, including the media they consume. With the rise in popularity of reality TV, many teens are beginning to base their perspectives on what they perceive to be an insight into the lives of real people but is really a false narrative pieced together with acting and editing.

I can say for certain that as I watched "Love Island" this summer, I constantly wondered what might happen next. I worried for the men and women on the show. I grew attached to the contestants; I cared for them. They almost felt like friends at that point. I realized I actually spent a large majority of my time watching other people on a show, rather than

focusing on my own life. It was distracting, and it consumed my time. That was when I asked myself, how many other people get sucked into the show on this level? The answer, unfortunately, is almost all viewers of the series.

A common theme across every reality show, whether that be "Dance Moms," "The Kardashians," or "Love Island," is misery among participants. At some point or another, the fragile, ordinary people can not handle their pain anymore and break down. When we watch these dramatic scenes, our brains release dopamine, a hormone associated with pleasure. This hooks watchers in, increasing viewership.

The actions of casts on these series and others like it influence teenagers' perception of life, thereby prompting youth to replicate similar behavior that reflect poor judgment and impulsivity.

During human development, teenagers have not fully developed, particularly in their brains. The prefrontal cortexes of the brain, which regulate decision-making and behavior, continue to develop until the age of 25. During this development, weaker connections are severed while stronger ones are maintained. Therefore the watching of reality TV can lead to the internalization of toxic behavior, as the brain is still forming perspectives based on its surroundings, in this case, television.

The GSRI survey displayed that 100 percent of respondents believed that female actors on reality shows are pitted against each other, promoting drama and arguments. Respondents that watched reality TV displayed that they had internalized this behavior, with 75 percent saying that gossiping and turning on your friends was a normal part of friendships, compared to only 54 percent of those who did not watch reality TV agreeing with this statement.

Not only are personalities changing throughout teenage years, but how teens treat themselves has developed into several mental health problems. Whether its body image, wealth, or negative stereotypes, reality TV does not fail to induce stress that can develop into these serious issues.

In a survey "Face Off" conducted in 2023, 23 percent of teenagers reported that they had suicidal thoughts after watching reality TV, and of that 23 percent, 75 percent said that it was because of their body image. On the screen, they see seemingly perfect skinny models with unlimited money, when in reality it is an intricate set up of perfect lighting, staged acting, hours of makeup and camera editing, and often outside plastic surgery, which only creates unrealistic expectations to live up to.

It saddens me to see that a fake reality is the most relevant expectation, but what can we do?

Producers should prioritize the mental well-being of young viewers and place age restrictions on their shows as well as disclaimers about mental health. Additionally, parents of teens who view these shows should educate their kids on what goes on behind the scenes by watching interviews of contestants that expose the fabrications that producers put in place. This unveiling of reality TV fabrications will lead to a happier, healthier community and world.

## E-Bikes

*Continued from 35*

children on an e-bike speeding along Mt. Diablo Blvd in the street, weaving around the lanes, putting their lives and others in danger. Unfortunately, young children and teenagers zipping around in the streets on e-bikes has become a relatively common sight across the nation.

Unsafe practices among e-bike riders go beyond simply breaking traffic laws.

"[H]elmet usage is noticeably lower among electric vehicle users, and risky behaviors, such as riding under the influence, are more prevalent," reported Kevin Li, team member in the UCSF study.

Not only do e-bikes pose a danger to the riders, but they also pose a danger to pedestrians and other cyclists on sidewalks. People often ride their e-bikes on sidewalks and other slower traffic areas, zipping around pedestrians and dogs at high speeds, which puts them at risk. This can especially be worrisome in business and downtown districts where there is higher pedestrian traffic.

To minimize hazards, more riders should be aware of safety, usage, and operational recommendations. Introducing a required education component during the e-bike registration process might be a holistic approach.

Reinforcing speed limits for bikers by expanding signage and increasing enforcement could help cities ensure safe commuting behavior in slower traffic areas.

The materials that power e-bikes present other pressing concerns to pedestrian safety. Lithium-ion batteries burn intensely and are susceptible to overheating, catching on fire, and exploding when damaged. Frequent causes of fire risk amongst e-bike users include improper charging practices, overloaded electrical circuits, and faulty charging equipment.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, in 2019, the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) reports 13 e-bike-caused fires. The FDNY reports that in 2022, that amount rose to 130 fires, resulting in five deaths and dozens of injured people.

Protecting citizens and safeguarding city resources are critical. Cities should consider installing e-bike charging zones around cities and in multi-family housing buildings to prevent e-bike fires and encourage proper charging practices.

E-bikes offer a promising step toward a sustainable future while simultaneously making the world of cycling more accessible, convenient, and affordable. However, to fully unlock the potential of e-bikes, governments need to step in and provide more regulation to ensure the safety of riders and everyone else.

# The Journey of Recruitment

*How up-and-coming athletes capture attention to secure their spot at the next level*

Arman Craig, Cameron Thornton, Max Trexler | Online Editor and Business and Community Outreach Team member, Print Sports Editor, and Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Photo/Haley Chelemedos

In the high stakes world of high school athletics, the journey from a standout athlete to a college recruit requires not only talent, but immense amounts of strategy and perseverance. At a school like Acalanes, athletes consistently produce at a high level. With the support from friends, family, and coaches, several athletes have been able to compete anywhere from the collegiate level to professional sports.

According to a National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) survey, roughly 6.3 percent of male and 7.1 percent of female high school athletes go on to play collegiate sports (only including sports offered at Acalanes). Compared to the Acalanes athletics' statistics, Acalanes athletes typically exceed these odds.

"I would say between eight to ten percent of our athletes go on to play at a higher level, whether it is division one, two, three, or National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) ... maybe 20 to 30 seniors go on to play in college," Athletic Director Randy Takahashi said.

The amount of funding a program receives is important as it gives athletes access to more resources. Acalanes programs gain most of their funding through parent contributions.

"Sports do some fundraising, but the great strength of the programs are the parents. Because we create a budget and we figure out what it will take to fund that team; and we ask for contributions. These are not mandatory but they do help make the experience better for the athletes," Takahashi said.

Although funding is extremely important to any athletic program, the hard work and dedication of the athletes can make the ultimate difference in whether a team is successful or not.

"[Funding] is very helpful, and you cannot run a program without the funding. But putting more money into a program does not make it more successful. It may make the experience better, because you can afford different things, but the success comes down to athletes working hard in the classroom and [on] the pool, court, or field," Takahashi said.

Not only do students want athletes to succeed, but coaches and administrators also strive to find the right fit for athletes at Acalanes. Working on both the mental and physical side of the sport, coaches help transform students into mature and responsible adults.

"Those that are getting scouted, I can help step in and give feedback on the player. Most of the feedback isn't about their skills, but more about their ability to be coachable, good teammates, and hard workers," varsity baseball Head Coach Connor Hornsby said.

As for the recruitment process, getting one's name out is essential to finding success. Regularly emailing colleges, as well as talking with schools can not only show interest but demonstrate a level of maturity which can resonate with coaches.

"The recruiting process was very busy. I was constantly emailing, calling and meeting with coaches. I spent the first six weekends of junior year flying out to recruiting trips [and] official visits. It was a very exciting time in my life. The process went both ways, I initiated conversations with certain schools and schools initiated contact with me," Acalanes 2024 alum and California State University Long Beach water polo player Brooklyn Plomp said.

Although colleges can only officially begin to recruit athletes at the end of their sophomore year for most sports, sometimes starting to play competitively at an early age can give athletes an advantage in the recruitment process if they are seeking to play in college or beyond.

"They watch you as you're growing up pretty much, and especially with [the Olympic Development Program] ... They're technically only allowed to reach out at the end of sophomore year ... [but] even before that [there were] some weekends where you could [go to the school] for a day and tour the campus, see a practice, meet the [players], but they couldn't officially recruit you at that point," Team USA Olympian and Acalanes alum Jewel Roemer said.

Over time, the recruitment process can get tedious and nerve-racking. Being left with many unknowns, athletes often feel lost in the process.

"I think that there is added pressure when it comes to those that want to succeed and play at the next level, especially those who work hard every day to get an opportunity to play college baseball. It's a lot harder to get scouted nowadays and that alone adds more pressure," Hornsby said.

During the recruiting process, it is important for an athlete to have a good support system, whether that consists of family, coaches, or teammates, to give advice and help them make difficult decisions.

"Throughout [the recruiting] process my sister helped a lot because she went through the same process, as she ran [track] in college as well. My parents and coaches were a constant source of support throughout the whole thing as well," Acalanes 2024 alum and University of California Santa Barbara track and field athlete Natalie Lyons said.

Once noticed, separating oneself from other athletes is essential. Doing things others can not, in the sport and out of it, will make a difference in recruiters' eyes.

"There are so many athletes with your height, skillset and athleticism, what will separate you from the rest? All the little things do matter; they are watching ... how you interact with your teammates, coaches, refs, fans et cetera," varsity girls basketball Head Coach Margaret Gartner said.

Although talent is a very important factor in whether or not an athlete gets recruited, collegiate recruiters not only focus on how skilled an athlete is, but also their ambitions and the effort they put in.

"I think that the most important things recruiters look for in an athlete besides athletic ability are character, discipline, and attitude. Coaches recruit athletes who are hard workers who are enjoyable to be around even on the toughest days. They don't look for someone who is looking to be on the best team, they look for those who aspire to be the best for the team," Plomp said.

In getting recruited there are some factors that are out of an athlete's control. Oftentimes, colleges need to fill a specific role or position on their team, and therefore look for athletes who have a specialized skill set.

"In high school your best athletes are going to be your best offensive players [and] one of if not your best defensive player. But college game at the highest level is way more specialized ... and so it really depends on what [the college team's] needs are and what they think the player they are looking at projects to be able to do at the intercollegiate level," women's water polo Head Coach Misha Buchel said.

In order to make it to the next level, it is important that athletes utilize their time, even when their sport is not actively in season.

"My biggest piece of advice would be to take advantage of the off-season and pre-season. These are your best times to perfect the fundamentals and improve technique as well as consistently train in the weight room. With out the off season or preseason, your training time is much more limited than you would think," Lyons said.

*Blueprint* Graphic/Justin Rosenblatt

Having a strong work ethic and being consistent is a major contributor to an athlete's success. Putting in full effort can improve an athlete's performance as well as give them a better chance at making it to the collegiate level.

"It is just full commitment to everything you do. It has got to be showing up to practice every day, first in, last out. It is making sure you are working hard through every drill, that you are always looking for opportunities to make yourself better," Buchel said. "To make it from high school to college and especially at those highest levels, you just have to have the whole package, and a huge part of that is making sure you are not just relying on your talent because you are playing against inferior players ... but you also need to make sure you are maximizing that by [doing] hard work," Buchel said.

Even through extreme difficulty, many athletes have successfully achieved their goal of playing at the next level. Roemer recently competed at the 2024 Paris Olympics for the USA women's water polo team. Looking back, she commends Acalanes as a stepping stone in her athletic career in which she developed and improved as a player.

"Acalanes was a very nurturing environment for me and a really fun experience. Water polo in northern California isn't super strong compared to southern California. ... So I took on more of a leadership role and that helped me learn some skills that I definitely use now," Roemer said.

While focusing on making it to the collegiate level is important, athletes should also consider using their time in high school to make a positive impact on their athletic programs, and strive to set a standard that sets future teams up for success.

"We have the [championship] banner ... that we point to to [show] our current athletes and say 'This is the standard that we set here, this is what our expectations are, of putting up another [championship banner] sometime, and the only way you can get there is by doing what that team did which is work hard [and] compete to the best of your ability ... That is what made that team special and they set a culture that the teams after them are expected to meet ... The presence of Jewel [Roemer] and the other players that were a part of that team, their legacy is one that we talk about all the time as being the standard for what we expect out of future teams," Buchel said.

If athletes desire to fulfill their dreams of continuing their athletic careers beyond high school, there are many hurdles they must overcome, but if an athlete consistently focuses on bettering themselves regardless of external factors, they have a better chance of achieving success.

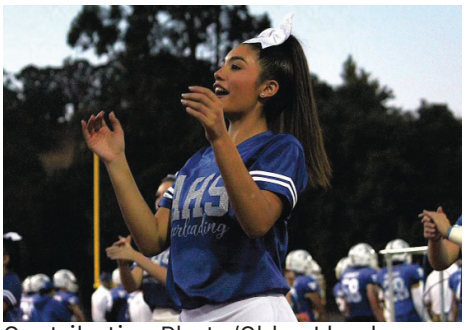
"You can always control your effort and your attitude and you cannot really control if you get injured, you cannot control your coaches and your teammates, but you can control how you show up every day," Roemer said.

# Meet Your Fall Sports Captains

*A look into team captain's roles and goals for their upcoming season*

Maya Stafford, Nico Roig, Cameron Thornton, Maddie Obertello, and Natalie Pecci | Print Arts Editor, Print Sports Editors, and Staff Writers

**Cheer: Erica Gombodorj, Sienna Hope, Heloisa Mateus, and Ruby Robinson**



Contributing Photo/Chloe Lloyd

With the cheer season commencing, team captains and seniors Erica Gombodorj, Sienna Hope, Heloisa Mateus, and Ruby Robinson are focusing on creating a unified team. Striving to leave a lasting impact on the cheer program, the captains are working to guide the team to success.

With the stress of performing in front of large audiences, the captains are committed to supporting the team and creating a positive experience for all.

"I really just want to support everyone this year, I know people can get really nervous before halftimes or rallies," Hope said.

The athletes support each other throughout the season and value the connections made through the program.

"I really enjoy learning new routines. My teammates are so good and I just love the environment and my coaches so much," Robinson said.

The captains and coaches work together to ensure athletes not only develop their technical skills, but improve their abilities to create bonds and cooperate with others.

"Our goal is for every single one of them to finish the season feeling like they have learned a ton of new skills, both tactical and interpersonal, that will stick with them long after their cheerleading days and well into their careers," varsity Head Coach Faith Mcleod said.

With the support of their coaches and captains, alongside the goal of building a positive learning environment, the cheer team is preparing to have a successful season.

"I just want everyone to know that they are doing really well in their role on the team. I want to teach people things but also just be there for everyone," Hope said.

**Cross Country: TJ Cronin, Nathan Joseph, Cameron Powell*, Neve Murphy*, Dash Tinianow, and Harry Zimmerman**

Contributing Photo/Eric Morford

The slight chill in the air marks the beginning of the fall and cross country season. This year's team captains are seniors TJ Cronin, Nathan Joseph, Cameron Powell*, and juniors Neve Murphy*, Dash Tinianow, and Harry Zimmerman.

The captains work to tie the team together by building a positive team culture.

"[We try to be] inclusive to new athletes, bringing more stuff to practice besides just running, more games, more team bondings at someone's house," Tinianow said.

While success is important, coaches also consider the team's goals when deciding captains.

"[The captains] all share the unified goal of the overall team ... to not only improve themselves but help each other improve," varsity coach Jeff Hutson said.

The Dons recently decided to alter their tradition of players selecting captains to the coaches choosing who leads the team.

"Going this direction is unique, but it is clear that they have very specific objectives and ideas on how to meet those objectives," Hutson said.

**Flag Football: Romi Avrahami, Haley Chelemedos*, Hana Chelemedos***

Courtesy Photo/Romi Avrahami

With flag football entering its second season ever at Acalanes, team captains and seniors Romi Avrahami, Haley Chelemedos*, and Hana Chelemedos* prepare to defend Acalanes' title as Diablo Athletic League (DAL) champions.

Flag football is a highly interactive team sport in which bondings make the team stronger. The captains have already begun to build a strong community.

"So far, we have had a team dinner, and gotten Jamba Juice together after our first scrimmage. I am hoping to do some other team dinners and possibly a [gift exchange] at the end of the season," Avrahami said.

With many inexperienced and young athletes in the newly added sports program, improvement and progression will be exponential in the upcoming season, fueled by encouragement from the captains.

"I am most looking forward to seeing our progress this season. Almost all of our players, including myself, are new, so I am already looking forward to seeing the way my teammates apply skills we learned in practice and effectively [use] them on the field," Hana Chelemedos said.

**Football: Deonte Littlejohn, Drew McKenzie, Andrew Tresser, and Niko White**

*Blueprint* Photo/Haley Chelemedos

As the bright stadium lights shine down on a cool Friday evening, seniors Andrew Tresser, Niko White, Drew McKenzie, and junior Deonte Littlejohn take to the field as captains.

Last year, the Dons went on a historic run in the North Coast Section (NCS) and California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) playoffs, winning the first state title in the school's history. Expectations are high as the captains hope to follow up on last year's success.

"I am excited to play football again and make another run at a state title," Littlejohn said.

Given their age and experience playing high school football, the captains work to uplift their fellow players.

"If someone is having a bad game, I try to keep their energy up by reminding them there is a long season ahead and more opportunities to succeed," Littlejohn said.

The team is also working towards games against rival teams in the regular season.

"I'm really excited to play in league games, especially versus schools like [Campolindo] and Miramonte," Littlejohn said.

**Women's Golf: Haley Chelemedos* and Hana Chelemedos***

*Blueprint* Photo/Justin Rosenblatt

As a new women's golf season gets into swing, senior team captains Haley Chelemedos* and Hana Chelemedos* strive to create a tight-knit and successful team.

Building off of successful seasons in past years, the captains hope to continue and even improve upon these successes as they move into the new season.

"A goal for us is to make it to the NCS championships again, making it the fourth year in a row. We had some great individual performances last year and want to keep it up," Hana Chelemedos said.

The captains understand that an important step to winning is developing a united team that hosts a supportive environment for all team members.

"Creating a unified team that communicates well and works towards a common goal is something Haley and I are working towards this year. We want to make sure everyone feels included which can really impact player performance," Hana Chelemedos said.

Led by their captains, the team is anticipating to have an eventful season as they grow closer throughout the season.

"I'm looking forward to playing in all our matches ... Because our team is small, we bond easily and always have a great time together," Hana Chelemedos said.

**Women's Tennis: Piper Duff and Sienna Moise**

*Blueprint* Photo/Audrey Martin

Entering the season with athletes from each grade, the women's tennis team buzzes with excitement for their upcoming season. Senior team captains Sienna Moise and Piper Duff hope to lead the team to victory this year through individual improvement and team bonding.

"This year, I hope the team becomes a tight-knit community that performs well. We have a lot of new players on the team, so I want this team to be bonded. We usually go all out with dress-ups and spirit days. I want to continue this and make sure we have fun together this year," Duff said.

The pair created a new bonding activity in which underclassmen are matched with upperclassmen.

"We are starting a new big and little sister program on our team, where everyone on our team gets a buddy to encourage each other throughout the season," Duff said.

The close-knit atmosphere of the team makes them similar to a family. Moise specifically has family ties to the program, as her younger sister is also on the team.

"I am looking forward to our league season starting, and bonding with our team, as the full circle moment of playing on the same team as my little sister, due to the fact that she is now in the position I was in as a freshman on varsity," Moise said.

Overall, the captains aim to build a sense of community within the team and make the season a fun and memorable experience.

"This year, I hope to create a team that feels like family and have a great season with lots of spirit," Moise said.

**Women's Volleyball: MaeLin Mason and Emme Seelenbacher**

*Blueprint* Photo/Haley Chelemedos

With the start of a new season of women's volleyball comes new captains who were selected by the players. This year's captains are seniors MaeLin Mason and Emme Seelenbacher. The captains hope to be role models to other players and help those who need it.

"I plan to be a crucial part of my team by encouraging everyone ... and being a leader for all of our sophomores and juniors on the team," Seelenbacher

said.

The captains aspire to set a good example for all the athletes who are part of the program, including those on the junior varsity (JV) and frosh teams.

"I hope to be a role model, especially for girls that aren't even on my team. A lot of the freshmen this year have not played before, so [I want to show] that it is possible to go all four years making the team without having prior experience," Seelenbacher said.

The Dons have been preparing for the new season and are eager to demonstrate their skills in games this year.

"[I want us to show] what we have been working so hard to do for the entire summer," Seelenbacher said.

This year, the team has numerous returning varsity players, and the Dons are ready for a competitive and successful season.

"I think they are really hungry to do well this season, so it is going to be a lot of fun, high-level volleyball this year," varsity Head Coach Haley Walsh said.

**Women's Water Polo: Levand Koopah* and Maddie Walsh**

*Blueprint* Photo/Sophie Chinn

In this upcoming women's water polo season, team captains and seniors Levand Koopah* and Maddie Walsh strives to be role models and work hard to make the team the best it can be. The captains understand that creating a close-knit community within the team is vital to having a good season.

"We had a lot of great senior graduates last year and a lot of new faces on the team. I hope that this year we can create bonds with each other and have a fun season," Koopah said.

The role of team captain comes with the expectation of bringing leadership to the team and leading by example.

"[I expect the captains to] set a positive tone of wanting to be there [and] wanting to demonstrate our love of the sport by competing hard as Dons," varsity Head Coach Misha Buchel said.

The team started off the season with their annual trip to Tahoe, and they will continue to have bonding experiences throughout the season.

"We already went to Tahoe for our Tahoe retreat and that was really good bonding. We're [also] planning on doing dinners before every game," Walsh said.

Having a strong, unified, and close-knit team seems to be a valuable aspect of being a part of women's water polo.

"I'm really looking forward to having a close team because that's the most important thing for me and just having a good environment that my teammates feel safe around," Walsh said.

*Look to* Blueprint *online to read about the men's water polo captains.*

***Blueprint** would like to acknowledge that Hana Chelemedos' sister, Haley Chelemedos is a part of* **Blueprint** *staff.* **Blueprint** *would also like to acknowledge that Levand Koopah, Haley Chelemedos, Cameron Powell and Neve Murphy are members of* **Blueprint** *staff.*

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# Going for Gold: USWNT's Olympic Trials and Triumphs

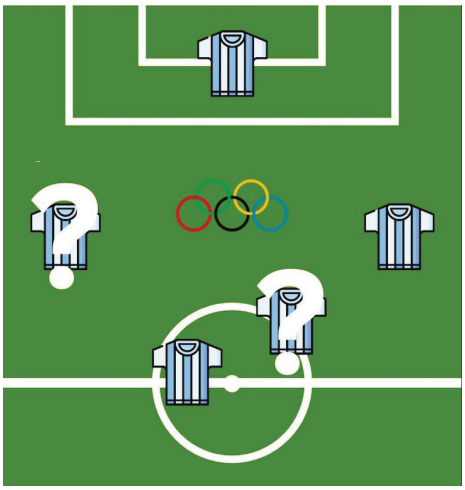
*Controversy behind the roster decisions and highlights of the journey*

Olivia Foster | Head Section Editor

After a devastating early exit in the 2023 Women's World Cup, all eyes were on the United States women's national soccer team (USWNT) as they stepped onto one of the world's greatest stages this summer in Paris: the Olympics.

Though many were excited to see the USWNT compete in the Paris Olympic Games this summer, there was also concern raised about controversy in roster choices. However, the team was able to walk off the field with gold medals under the new leadership of coach Emma Hayes and the incredible efforts made, especially by defender Naomi Girma and the trio known as Triple Espresso.

The Olympic roster for the USWNT was announced on June 26, with a couple of surprising names included and excluded. Namely, this roster did not include Olympic gold medalist and two-time World Cup champion Alex Morgan. Morgan has been playing with the USWNT since 2010 and is a player that many young athletes admire. From her iconic pink pre-wrap look to her consistency as a forward on the field, it came as a surprise that she would not be representing the United States in the 2024 Olympics.



*Blueprint* Graphic/Haley Chelemedos

Morgan took to Instagram the same day as the announcement to make a statement about the decision.

"Today, I'm disappointed about not having the opportunity to represent our country on the Olympic Stage. This will always be a tournament that is close to my heart, and I take immense pride in it any time I put on the crest. In less than a month, I look forward to supporting this team and cheering them on alongside the rest of our country," Morgan said via Instagram.

Staying true to her word, Morgan supported the team from afar. However, on Sept. 5, Morgan announced her retirement from professional soccer. Despite her lack of attendance at the Olympics, Morgan will always be respected by aspiring soccer players for the path she blazed in the world of women's soccer.

Another unexpected twist to the 2024 Olympic roster was the inclusion of 20-year-old Paris Saint-Germain Football Club midfielder Korbin Albert. Albert first played with the USWNT in Dec. 2023. This decision was not controversial because of Albert's abilities on the field, but because of her actions on social media.

In March, content that Albert had reposted surfaced, which deemed that "feeling transgender" or being gay is wrong. It was also noticed that Albert liked a post on Instagram that spread hate towards former USWNT player and activist Megan Rapinoe. The post that Albert liked read: "God taking time off performing miracles to make sure Megan Rapinoe sprains her ankle in her final ever game." Fans of the USWNT were especially disappointed in her disrespect towards Rapinoe, whose number, 15, Albert had inherited.

Albert apologized for her actions on social media, stating that she was disappointed in herself and was sorry for any hurt that she may have caused.

"I truly believe that everyone should feel safe and respected everywhere and on all playing fields. I know my actions have not lived up to that and for that I sincerely apologize. It's an honor and a privilege to get to play this sport on this world stage and I promise to do better," Albert said via Instagram.

Despite this apology and recognition of wrongdoings, fans of the USWNT did not forget the choices she made and booed her in an international friendly game that took place June 1, the first day of Pride Month.

Nevertheless, Albert's name appeared on the 2024 Olympic roster and she scored what would become a crucial goal for the team against Australia in the worldwide tournament, leading to a 2-1 win.

The person responsible for such roster decisions was the new head coach of the USWNT Emma Hayes. Hayes announced a young Olympic roster with an average age of 26.8. Nine of the 18 players had never played in the Olympic games before. These first-time Olympians included the forward trio known as Triple Espresso and defender Naomi Girma.

The trio, who together scored nine out of the 11 goals made by the USWNT in their Olympic matches, actually proposed the name for themselves.

"We have a proposal for our trio name to be 'Triple Espresso,' so we're going to put that out into the air and let people run with that, because we like that as well," Trinity Rodman said via an interview with "TODAY."

Though it was all three of their first time at the Olympic games, Sophia Smith, Trinity Rodman, and Mallory Swanson pulled through for the team when it was truly needed. Most notably, the gold medal-winning goal was put in the back of the net by Swanson, putting the team in the 1-0 lead that won them the game. Swanson's overall play throughout the tournament was applauded for her amazing impact on the field despite coming off of a torn patellar tendon injury that happened in 2023.

Center-back Girma was also highly praised by soccer fans for her incredible defense throughout the tournament. Coach Hayes clearly recognized Girma's importance on the field by keeping her in for every minute of each game.

Despite some surprising roster decisions, the USWNT came home with gold medals, a testament to their team chemistry, strength, and ability to grow together.

# Meet the Cheer Coaches

*The cheerleading program welcomes three new coaches*

Helena McGinley and Mila Ellis | News Copy Editor and Staff Writer

As the rally music swells, the cheer team runs onto the mats and prepares to perform their complicated stunt routine. Many cheerleaders credit this season's improvements to the new coaches.

Faith McLeod, Arianna Engelhaupt, and Selena Sisneroz are the new Acalanes cheer coaches. They hope to transform the team using their years of experience and combined passion for cheerleading. Their dedication to the sport and respect from the team brings high hopes for this season.

McLeod began her cheerleading journey at Freedom High School and continued on to cheer at the University of California (UC) Berkeley. She also acted as a stunt judge, first encountering the Acalanes cheer team in 2022.

"From the moment that I saw the stunt team compete back in 2022, I have always had the goal of increasing their skills and pushing them to try new things. Cheerleading and stunting can be a very intimidating sport that requires not only technique, strength, and skill but also a huge amount of fearlessness. As I grow with the team and program, I hope to instill the needed confidence and skill it takes to be a competitive cheerleader," McLeod said.

Many cheerleaders agree that the new coaching efforts and implementation of rules have helped strengthen the team.

"I can tell that the new coaches are dedicated to this team and wish only the best for us. Even though the season has only just begun, my coaches have reinforced new rules, such as an attendance policy, in order for our team to reach our highest potential," varsity cheer captain and senior Erica Gombodorj said.

Engelhaupt entered the cheer world in middle school and continued cheering through college at Northern Arizona University. She attended high school with McLeod, who invited her to coach at Acalanes. The Acalanes cheerleading program has welcomed the arrival of Engelhaupt as the head coach of the junior varsity (JV) team.

"I enjoy the performing aspect. That was always one of my favorite things about cheer," Engelhaupt said.

Some see major change in the dynamics of the JV team, noting that they are growing both physically and mentally.

"I really respect [Engelhaupt] as a coach. She strives to improve us as cheerleaders and as people. As much as she is persistent and on task, she is also very outgoing and can get on a personal level with us. As a returner, I feel the team has unified a lot better. We really understand [the sport] and are there for each other," JV cheer captain and sophomore Lily Campbell said.

Sisneroz started her cheerleading career at Liberty High School. She continued her athletic career during her time at UC Berkeley, where she became a national champion and served as captain for both the sideline and stunt cheer teams.

Sisneroz views cheerleading as a community in which the physical and mental demands are just as important to the sport as the friendships and family that are developed.

"For me, cheerleading is more than just a sport, it is a community. The camaraderie and work ethic that cheer demands are unparalleled. It pushes you physically while also bringing lifelong friendships into your life. There's nothing quite like the adrenaline rush of a halftime performance, a stunt match, or being in the middle of a close game with your best friends by your side. The bonds you form and the memories you create through cheerleading are truly something special," Sisneroz said.

Courtesy Photo/Kate Lee
McLeod and Engelhaupt repping their Acalanes gear before a football game.

Some students noticed an immediate improvement in the skills and confidence of the cheerleaders while performing advanced stunts and routines.

"I think that this year was definitely better than last year and I thought that they did really well, and also at the rally I was really impressed with their dance moves and tricks," sophomore Cate Mercier said.

Many students are excited about what the cheerleading program has in store, and look forward to continuing to participate in school spirit.

"Looking to the future, I definitely see our team being a lot more integrated and supported within the school and student body. I have really high hopes for this as I've already seen so much growth these past two years," varsity cheer captain and senior Sienna Hope said.

# Sports Beats

## Women's Golf

Owen Curley | Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Photo/Haley Chelemedos
Jordan Huskins putts in her match against Miramonte.

A fresh season awaits for the Acalanes women's golf team (3-3 overall, 2-3 league) as they enter the season with high expectations, trying to follow up their previous successes.

On Aug. 19 the team opened their season against College Park at Acalanes' home course, Contra Costa Country Club. The Dons won by 17 strokes (263-246).

After the strong win they then went on to lose their next three matches, against Northgate on Aug. 26 (252-224) and Aug. 28 (254-216), and then again against Miramonte (262-260) on Sept. 3.

Even though it has not been the start the Dons were looking for, they are confident in their team and know what they need to do to succeed down the road.

"We could improve [by] making sure everyone [here is] dedicated, everyone's showing up to practices and practicing a lot more," junior Taylor Baker said.

## Football

Will Miller | Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Photo/Isaac Topp
Austin Wampler runs the ball.

The Acalanes football team (2-1 overall, 0-0 league) is off to a strong start and is looking forward to a great season.

The Dons kicked off the season with a big win against Lowell in their home opener, advancing them to a pristine 1-0 record, and then took down Mt Diablo.

The team had another blowout win, beating Mt. Diablo 48-7 on Sept. 9.

After a last minute sceduling against Del Oro on Sept. 13, the Dons suffered their first defeat 21-34. They will take on College Park for the homecoming game on Sept. 20.

The Dons had a historic run last year, winning the first North Coast Section title in school history and later winning the state title. The team is optimistic for future success even after such a large senior class department.

"A lot of seniors [graduated] last year, but I think we're very talented and I think we're gonna have a great season if we play with the capabilities I think we can play," varsity Head Coach Floyd Burnsed said.

## Cross Country

Max Trexler | Staff Writer

Contributing Photo/Eric Morford
Charlotte Sutherland conquers a steep hill.

The Acalanes cross country team is heading into the upcoming season with optimism to improve.

The Dons competed in their first meet at the Viking Invitational in Santa Rosa on Sept. 14. Junior Harry Zimmerman finished third in the boys junior race and senior Charlotte Sutherland finished eleventh in the junior/senior girls race.

Coming off last season, the Dons are looking forward to the new faces of young talent that joined the team. After a state appearance for the girls team, the entire program has lost some runners to graduation and other sports.

The Dons are looking forward to surprising some people at North Coast Section (NCS) and hopefully state.

"It sucks we lost so many people, but on the bright side we have the younger talent who most definitely have a strong upside to bring to this team; hopefully making it past the North Coast Section [and] into state," cross country captain and senior TJ Cronin said.

## Men's Waterpolo

Owen Curley | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/Chris Andre
The team has a discussion during halftime.

The Acalanes men's water polo team (4-5 overall, 0-0 league) looks to make waves as they start their 2024 season.

The Dons didn't quite get the start they were hoping for, finishing the Labor Day Bash Tournament with one win and three losses.

Their first win came against Encinal on Aug. 30 in a 17-9 victory. That same day they came up short against Newark Memorial (3-15). On Aug. 31 they lost to Castro Valley (6-14) and Dougherty Valley (6-9).

The Dons bounced back on Sept. 3 winning their first regular season game of the year against El Cerrito (12-7). The team then hosted Marin Catholic putting up a good fight but ultimately falling short in a 9-10 loss. They will take on our league rival Las Lomas in their next game on Oct. 2.

Despite initial struggles, coaches and players know how they can improve as the season progresses.

"[By] maintaining a team atmosphere and constant communication in the pool, [and] if we're all on the same page ... we

will continue to have a successful season," Head Coach Nick Jordan said.

## Flag Football

Sela Sarbiewski | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/Manny Myers
The team cheers before their game.

After thirteen victories last fall and saying goodbye to just as many seniors, the flag football team (0-3 overall, 0-0 league) is looking forward to new competition and strong team culture this season.

The team had close losses against Las Lomas on Sept. 4 and Alameda and Heritage on Sept. 7. The Dons have been practicing every day this fall and are preparing for their next games against Alhambra and Concord on Sept. 18 and Benicia and Mt. Diablo on Sept. 25.

The positive atmosphere within the team makes the sport more enjoyable for the players as they carry their spirit into the team's second ever season at Acalanes.

"I just like being a part of the sport ... everyone is always having a good time," junior Maya Shoenhair said.

## Women's Tennis

Samantha Swift | Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Photo/Audrey Martin
Piper Duff serves the ball during a scrimmage against Carondelet.

As the season begins, the women's varsity tennis team (2-2 overall, 0-0 league) are ready to serve up an incredible season.

Acalanes narrowly lost their first match to Bishop O'Dowd on Aug. 27, with a score of 4-5, and were defeated in another close match against Carondelet on Sep. 5, with the same score. The Dons competed in the Freedom Varsity Invitational on Sept. 14, in which they played all day in multiple matches, beating McClatchy with a score of 4-3, and winning against Heritage with a score of 4-3.

The team has its first home match Sept. 17 against Miramonte, followed by another home match on Sept. 19 against Campolindo.

With many returning players with varsity experience, the team is expected to come in even stronger than last season, ready to dominate on the courts.

"The change from last year is that five of the six singles players all came back this year ... this year I know we are gonna do better because we have much more experience," Head Coach Sharon Langtry said.

## Women's Volleyball

Olivia Silverstein | Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Photo/Haley Chelemedos
Annie Baker and *Sydney Scovic block against Carondelet on Sept. 14.

The varsity women's volleyball team (7-7 overall, 0-0 league) kicks off the season with a strong start, planning to expand on their successes from last year.

From Aug. 30 to Aug. 31, the team competed in its first tournament of the season in Reno. The Dons played seven matches overall, leaving the tournament with a 4-3 record.

On Sept. 3, the team played their first home match against Monte Vista, suffering a 0-3 loss. Soon after, the Dons made a strong comeback, dominating Moreau Catholic with a score of 3-0 on Sept. 4 and crushing Archie Williams 3-0 on Sept. 6. On Sept. 14 the Dons played Miramonte winning 2-0 and California high school losing 1-2.

The Dons will compete against Campolindo at home on Sept. 19.

As the team is composed of mostly returning players, this season is anticipated to be exciting and successful.

"This group as a whole is a very capable group, last year we were capable as well but we were young, ... Now that they are accustomed to [varsity play] ... I think they are a lot more hungry," Head Coach Haley Walsh said.

## Women's Waterpolo

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Staff Writer

*Blueprint* Photo/Margaux Stone
Malin Stone winds up to throw the ball in a game against Amador Valley.

The women's water polo team (4-1 overall, 0-0 league) is using their momentum and skills from last season to start the season off strong.

In their first game, the Dons defeated Amador Valley on Sept. 6 with a score of 14-3. Junior Ella Del Rosario led the team with five goals. The same day, the team competed against Sacred Heart Prep, suffering a tough loss with a score of 3-13.

The Dons hosted the Acalanes Invitational on Sept. 7 in which they went undefeated, taking down David Sr. High School with a score of 10-3 and San Ramon Valley with a score of 12-3. A week later on Sept. 14, the Dons played St. Ignatius College Preparatory and won 21-12.

Hoping to expand upon their early successes, the Dons will be facing off against Carondelet on Sept. 24.

This season will be a period of growth for the Dons, only having five returning varsity players on this season's roster.

"We have huge space to fill so that is what the early part of this year is [about], figuring out how to have people step up into the larger roles," varsity Head Coach Misha Buchel said.

***Blueprint** would like to acknowledge that Sydney Scovic is a member of* **Bueprint** *Staff.*

# Athletes of the Issue

*Blueprint* Photo/Haley Chelemedos

## Niko White

Sophie Chinn | Online Editor-in-Chief

As the football team (2-1 overall, 0-0 league) kicks off their season, senior wide receiver and free safety Niko White is living up to high expectations.

After winning the CIF State Division 3-AA football championship last year, the team lost most of their offensive weapons.

During the preseason, White proved himself as the new leader of this squad, working hard both on the field and in the weight room.

"Niko is a very dedicated athlete. He was in the weight room in the winter and spring at six a.m. He leads through example and was voted captain by his teammates," Head Coach Floyd Burnsed said.

On Aug. 8, the Dons took on Lowell High School, and White came out smoking. He had 193 all-purpose yards and three touchdowns.

As captain and starting player on both sides of the ball, White is responsible for keeping the team motivated and focused on the game.

"He has a passion for perfection and motivates those around him to be better after every play. Niko keeps others focused by doing his work, but also by watching and correcting others and giving his advice on how to help others play to their best," senior Andrew Tresser said.

As the Dons move through the season, White will be a key asset to the team's success.

"Niko's ethic and overall attitude are electric, and he is always prepared for what is next. He will ensure everyone keeps their head in the game, and keep morale up no matter the score," Tresser said.

## Emme Seelenbacher

Haley Chelemedos | Print Managing Editor and Print Head of Layout

After an exciting run in the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) State championship bracket last season, women's volleyball (7-7 overall, 0-0 league) setter and senior Emme Seelenbacher has returned ready to dominate.

Seelenbacher, a three-year varsity player, continues proving her worth as an offensive and defensive asset.

"Emme has only gotten better across the years I've played with her ... Her hitting and defense are unbeatable and her skills and efficiency in setting are a major factor in the successes of our team," senior Addy Treter said.

Seelenbacher's comprehensive knowledge of the game and strong work ethic and determination have set her apart from other players.

"I think Emme is an example of someone who is working hard and is really trying to implement what we're working towards as a program. Head Coach Haley Walsh said.

Keeping the team engaged during practices and games, Seelenbacher demonstrates leadership and a commitment to the sport. Her ability to motivate and energize her teammates fosters a focused environment essential for team success.

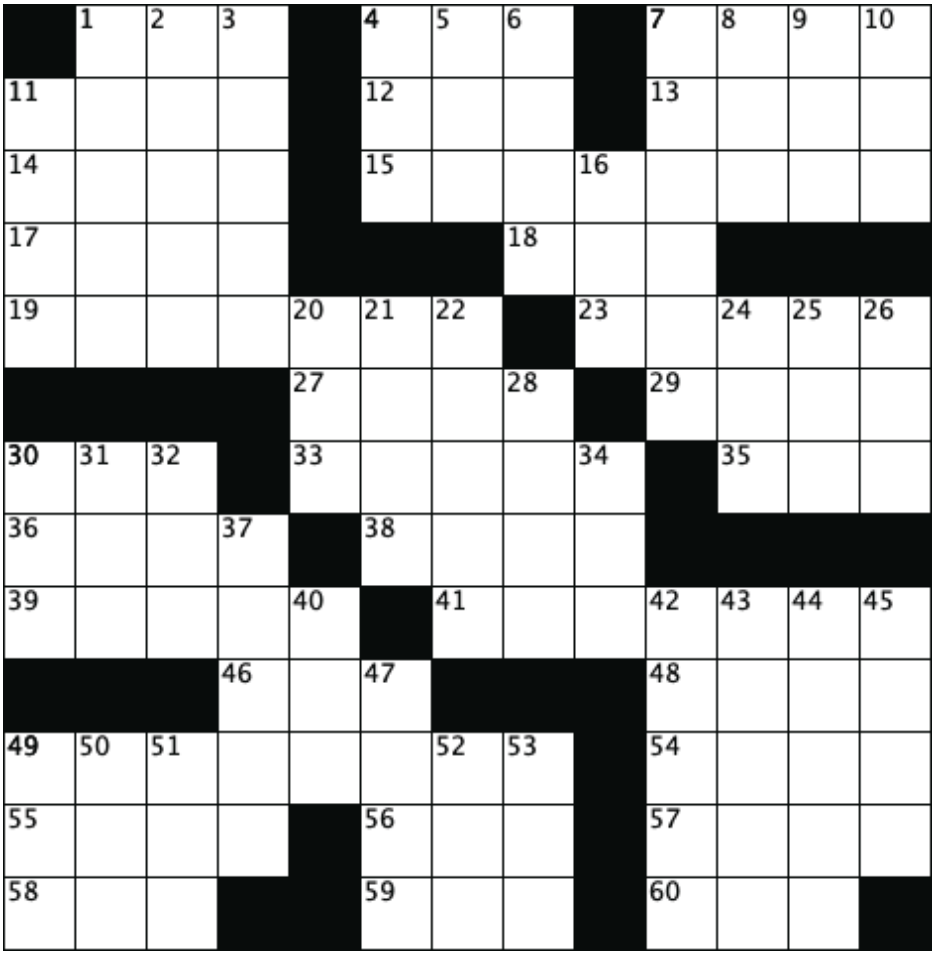
"Emme is very communicative and really good about keeping people up to par on the court. She does a great job of holding everyone accountable for their actions and making sure we are all playing to the best of our ability," Treter said.

*Blueprint* Photo/Sophie Chinn

# Crossword

Created by Sameed Marco and Nico Roig | Head Cruciverbalists

*In honor of homecoming, the four class themes are worked into the puzzle and marked withitalics. Good luck!*



**Across:**

1. Where someone in London gets their news
4. A high mountain in Switzerland
7. Zeus' grandmother
11. Common method for cooking steak
12. America's foreign intelligence agency
13. What one does with a doorbell
14. A French meat spread
15. An honorific title
17. Pain
18. ___ Thompson, actress for Marty McFly's mother in the past
19. Alan ____, the first American to travel to space
23. Russian monarchs
*27. One-third of a yard*
29. Senses of self-importance
30. A tendency to do something
33. Broadcast company mainly covering Congress
35. Not even
*36. Adolescent*
38. 60 in a min.
39. Female equivalent to sir
41. An alpine singer
46. Middle school in Lamo area
48. Crazy in Spanish
*49. Exasperated expression*
54. British lavatories
55. Negative prefix
56. Website link (acronym)
57. Small piece of land surrounded by water
58. Affirmative
59. Receive
60. Sen__, term for a teacher

**Down:**

*1. Where the land meets the water*
2. To wash oneself
3. To stealthily walk
4. Can be high or low
5. Calc. notation
6. Bucket
*7. Bacon residue*
8. River in France, rhymes with neighboring country
9. Monsters ___, Mike Wazowski's workplace
10. Changes every year
11. Locations for relaxing
16. "I like to cast a wide ___"
20. 2024 Super Bowl champ's conference
21. A place to "Dress for Less"
22. Brother of Grumpy and Sleepy
24. "A long time ___, in a galaxy far, far away"
25. Like a pole
26. Computer storage device (acronym)
28. Common Mexican dish
30. A place for quick withdrawls and deposit
31. What ruined the princess' sleep
32. Organization known for their talks
34. Branch of the DOJ
37. _____ Osaka, tennis player
40. A displaced soldier (acronym)
42. Historically important island for immigration
*43. Baggy*
44. Bacteria that causes food poisoning
45. A thorny flower
47. Pleased with oneself
49. The fifth month
50. Single unit or thing, in Scotland
51. NYC metro system
52. Anger
53. Often next to ctrl

Check *Blueprint* online for Crossword answers!